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HANNAH MORE.

TWELVE ENGLISH AUTHORESSES.

I.—HANNAH MORE.

HANNAH MORE, one of the most remarkable women in England at the close of the last and beginning of the present century, may fitly form the subject for the opening number of a series of brief papers on famous English authoresses.

The past hundred years have been prolific in giving to the world works both in prose and poetry by Englishwomen of talent—works of the highest excellence and enduring interest—and in restricting myself to a series of twelve biographical sketches of eminent female writers I have found some difficulty in making a selection; but the aim set before me being to give the readers of *Far and Near* some sort of idea of the personal life and surroundings of writers with whose productions, or, at any rate, with whose names, they are already familiar, I have, after careful study,

set aside those whose works, however popular in their own country, have not penetrated beyond it, and have confined myself solely to a list of authors whose reputation is world-wide. Hannah More, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Harriet Martineau, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Mary Somerville, Felicia Hemans, Jane Taylor, Emily Gaskell, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and 'George Eliot'; these are women who in their several lines all won distinction not confined to the limits of their native land, and whose personality consequently must have an interest for every reader.

Although not strictly confining myself to dates, I will roughly endeavour to take the subject of each memoir according to the period in which she lived; but as many of the above-named were contemporaries, the one which chances to suit priority best will be taken first.

Hannah More on every ground is a fitting leader, as has been already remarked. She and Fanny Burney sparkled as stars in the literary firmament during much the same time,—but Miss Burney, though the most brilliant novelist of her day, was by no means the power, and never attained to the position held by the spinster of Barley Wood; wherefore let us begin with Hannah More.

Born in the year 1745, of respectable but not aristocratic parentage, Hannah, between the ages of three and four, contrived to teach herself to read, since nobody in a busy household had time to teach her. This did not argue any neglect of education on the part of the parents. They had four elder daughters, all of whom were being carefully educated, and naturally they thought that the little one of three and a half might wait for her instructions. No sooner, however, was it discovered that Hannah's small feet were struggling along the stony ways of learning unaided, than her well-pleased father held out a helping hand, and began a thorough if somewhat peculiar mode of tuition. We are told that from dearth of other sources, he fell back upon his memory to supply him with tales of ancient heroes, Greek and Roman, and that part of the morning hour set aside for his tiny scholar was dedicated to the recitation of their speeches, first in the original, 'that her ear might be gratified by the sound,' and afterwards in English, 'that she might pay heed to the sense'.

The picture is a striking one. We can in our mind's eye behold the illumined countenance of the orator, fired by the glowing language and noble thoughts he was declaiming, and the attentive, solemn, little creature opposite, seated

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was 'Eloquence'. So eloquent was the speaker, and so inspiring the theme, that his words set on fire enthusiastic sixteen, and drew from one auditor of that tender age a copy of verses which led not only to his seeking acquaintance with their author, but to his predicting a great career for her in the future.

That Hannah possessed, in addition to other gifts, fascination, is again evidenced by a trifle. She was somewhat seriously ill, and a physician of eminence had been summoned. On one occasion, so carried away was he by his patient's charming conversation, that he entirely forgot the purport of his call, until suddenly, recollecting himself when half-way downstairs, he cried out: 'Bless me! I quite forgot to ask the girl how she was!' and hurrying back to the room, exclaimed: 'How are you, to-day, my poor child?'

In her seventeenth year Hannah More wrote a pastoral drama entitled, 'The Search after Happiness,' and we can almost hear its lofty tones and long-winded paragraphs,—but it may as well be frankly owned that all such writings are now things of the past. People possess them, it is true, but only by inheritance. They are to be found on the topmost shelves of dust-bound libraries, in the back shops of old collectors, and

in 'job lots' at auctions. Practically they are defunct, lifeless.

A new generation has sprung up—one whose sole idea in connection with the name of the noted *blue-stocking* is that of a prim maiden lady of the conventional type, with a pious and literary turn of mind. Such an impression is highly erroneous. Hannah More was never prim, and until she was past forty years of age she was not distinguished for remarkable piety. Her character and principles were always above reproach, but she had by no means given herself up entirely to the service of her Maker when in the zenith of her fame and revelling in the full swing of London society.

This, I am aware, will to many be a new light thrown on the character of a great religious leader; but it is the true one, as abundantly evidenced in the many volumes of biography now by my side. For a considerable portion of her life Hannah's principal desire was to move in cultivated society of the best kind. It was only as she grew older that the resolution to be a *power for good* in the world was born within her bosom. Her introduction to Samuel Johnson, then dominating the literary world from his armchair at the old coffee-house in Fleet Street, or from Mrs. Thrale's more luxurious fireside at Streatham, was the first step

to fame. The meeting took place at the house of the famous painter, Sir Joshua Reynolds, in Leicester Square—a house still standing, with the name of its celebrated owner engraven on a small stone tablet beneath the front row of windows. It was not to have her picture painted, however, that one slight, girlish figure adjourned to Sir Joshua's abode on the occasion above mentioned; in her own words, it was to meet 'Abyssinia's Johnson! Dictionary's Johnson! Rambler, Idler and Irene's Johnson!' that Hannah More was all on the tiptoe of expectation. It was, she playfully averred, to catch some spark of his genius that she seated herself in a huge armchair—presumably devoted to his use—before he appeared. Johnson afterwards spoke in such terms of this youthful aspirant to intellectual honours as procured her an immediate entry into the best London society, where a password from him was all-sufficient; and once launched, no further support was needed.

At one bound the young country girl began to taste the sweets of consequence. Garrick, the great actor of the day, was her next friend. Nothing can be warmer than the terms in which she writes and speaks of him. His character is admired, his genius adored, and both he and his charming wife taken straightway to Hannah

More's heart of hearts. On one occasion she wrote: 'I'll tell you the most ridiculous thing in the world. After dinner Garrick took up "Sir Eldred" (her poem), and read it aloud with all his pathos and his grace. I think I never was so ashamed in my life, but he read it so superlatively that I cried like a child. Only think what a scandalous thing to do, to cry at the reading of one's own poetry! But the beauty of the jest lies in this: Mrs. Garrick twinkled as well as I, and made as many apologies for crying at her husband's reading as I did for crying at my own verses. *She* got out of the scrape by pretending she was touched by the story, and *I* by saying the same thing of the reading! It furnished us with a great laugh at the catastrophe, when it would really have been a little decent to be sorrowful.'

By Garrick's instigation, the tragedy of 'Percy' was finally written and brought out in 1777. Its author witnessed, 'twixt agonies of trepidation and exultation, the first performance, and 'behaved very well' by her own and every one's account; and of all the fine things that were said on the occasion, we need only quote the comment of the great actor himself, that she 'had had so much flattery, she might, if she would, have choked herself in her own pap'.

It was not only at the tables of Burke, Reynolds, Garrick, Mrs. Montague, Horace Walpole, and others of their order that the youthful wit and dramatist was to be found. Scarce a house of any note thought its party complete without her; princesses of the blood sought her friendship, the highest dignitaries of the Church her counsel. Her time was passed betwixt the intoxicating atmosphere of London and brief periods of repose at great country houses, the abodes of wealth and luxury. Occasionally, indeed, she would revisit her own family, and pass some weeks with the sisterhood at Bristol, and it is pleasant to have it recorded by one of these that 'Success and applause never made any difference to Hannah. She brought back on every occasion of revisiting her native scenes, her native simplicity unsullied by contact.' But it is nevertheless easy of comprehension that Hannah More could not have endured to *live* within the narrow range which bounded her worthy sisters' horizon. She was not and never could have been in perfect sympathy with humble jog-trot life. Her great intellectual gifts had not been bestowed on her to be hid under a bushel, and she was both following nature and following a divine instinct in using them for far-spreading purposes.

After some years passed as the fêted and caressed idol of society, Hannah More's character began to deepen and strengthen. She was ill-satisfied to lead an existence which, however blameless, was not ennobling. She was of *some* good in the world, she exercised a beneficial influence on many, she visited the poor, and she wrote vigorously on the side of religion and morality.

But this was not enough. Her second play, 'Fatal Falsehood,' having had a still greater run than 'Percy' (though Garrick, alas! was no longer alive to play in it), and her 'Sacred Dramas' being almost equally successful, her circumstances were now so easy that she might be called rich. She was at least rich enough to follow the bent of her own wishes; and, accordingly, in the year 1785 she bought a little country cottage, yclept 'Cowslip Green,' near Bath, and thither retired, in spite of the clamours of her friends and a message from no less a person than the saintly-minded John Wesley, bidding her be of good cheer and remain where she was. 'Tell her,' he said, 'to continue to live in the world. *There* is the sphere of her usefulness! They will not let *us* come near them.' Mrs. More (thus she was now styled, though she never married) probably felt that

on so momentous an occasion she must judge for herself, and doubtless she had also an inkling that she could continue to denounce and condemn the vices and follies of the period as well from 'Cowslip Green' as from anywhere else.

She was, it cannot be doubted, in the right. Her own life struck a purer and higher note from the moment of her so-called renunciation, and her pen was even more active and busy than it had been before. 'Thoughts on the Manners of the Great' and 'The Estimate of Religion' were followed by a set of village stories and ballads which, to my own view, are the only writings of this remarkable woman now worth preserving. Their reception was enthusiastic, and the sale enormous. *Two millions* were sold during the first year—an amount almost unparalleled then, and not very usual even now.

These were followed by the fiction of *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, and—'"Junius' Letters" or Chatterton's Poems hardly occasioned more eager controversy, or various research in public, than *Coelebs* has done in private,' affirmed one of the great lawyers of the time. The new departure in the shape of this last work—a novel—was undertaken by Mrs. More solely with a view of raising the tone of the

circulating library, which she termed 'a mart of mischief'. There were, she affirmed, 'already enough good books in the world for good people; but there was a larger class of readers whose wants were not sufficiently attended to'. Had she lived in these days the speaker could not thus have complained; but we must remember that Hannah More lived when books, as a rule, were either distinctly religious or distinctly vicious. It was left to Fanny Burney—(the subject of our next sketch)—to inaugurate an era of pure-minded fiction with a high moral tone; and this she certainly did, even though the language chosen be still somewhat strange to the 'ears polite' of the present day. *Coelebs* passed into thirty editions during the author's lifetime, each edition consisting of a thousand copies.

Hannah More's almost unparalleled influence over all classes of her countrymen and countrywomen was used by her as a gift from God. She was steady in her resolve to press it into His service. She cultivated friendships with people of every class and order to this single end. Among her intimate friends was Horace Walpole, the brilliant sceptic, and this was made the subject of comment by some. A brief glance into the diary of the noble-minded spinster

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timid and obscure girl, who had been wont to sit half behind the curtain in her father's house whilst friends and neighbours played their parts unsuspectingly before her face, now burst upon the world as a satirist of the first water. Nature had bestowed upon Fanny Burney one transcendently valuable faculty—that of holding her tongue whilst making use of her eyes and ears. She saw and heard at an age when most children only chatter. She possessed an enormous fund of silent observation. She drank in, instead of pouring out. No humours, foibles, whims, nor crotchets, however faintly depicted, however anxiously suppressed, escaped her notice. It appeared to her, so far as can be gathered, that every human being was governed and dominated by some one ruling propensity; which ruling propensity coming into contact with another of a different order—and these again with others as distinct from themselves—went far towards forming the fun of the world. To put this fun into shape was the secret delight of her repressed and chidden young life. Let us take a glance at that life.

It began in the year 1752, at the bright little seaport of Lynn on the Norfolk coast, of which place Dr. Burney, Fanny's father, was organist at the time. Soon afterwards, however, the family moved to London, and a house was found for

them in Poland Street, and afterwards in St. Martin's Street, on the south side of the then fashionable Leicester Square. The latter tenement carried with it an historic interest, as having been the dwelling of Sir Isaac Newton; and the square turret which had been Newton's observatory may still be seen; for the house is well known and easily distinguished. In Fanny Burney's time this abode was overrun by a motley crowd of friends and guests; for as her father's professional merit obtained for him the recognition of all the musical world, so did the sweetness of his disposition and the gentle simplicity of his manners win him ready entrance into the first literary circles.

It was natural that with society at his feet, the accomplished musical professor should desire to entertain society. Everybody was at his service. Says Macaulay: 'The greatest singers in England regarded him as the dispenser of fame in their art, and exerted themselves to obtain his suffrage. Pachierotti became his most intimate friend. The rapacious Agujari, who sang for nobody else under fifty pounds an air, sang her best to Dr. Burney without a fee; and in the company of Dr. Burney even the haughty and eccentric Gabrielli constrained herself to behave with civility.'

Meanwhile little Fanny sat behind her curtain peeping out. She was not encouraged to come

forth. Only one of a set of young people, and not an interesting nor striking member of the group, neither parent had a motive in her beauty or sprightliness for drawing upon her the notice of the gay throng. Moreover one of these parents was a stepmother; for having early lost his first wife, Dr. Burney had re-married when his daughter Fanny was in her sixteenth year; and the new Mrs. Burney, albeit a good-natured woman, saw nothing to boast of in a habit of 'scribbling' which she sought in vain to put a stop to, and no indications of talent in the little fictitious narratives wherewith 'Fannikin' used to amuse her sisters. Quite the contrary. A series of well-meant lectures on the subject induced the idle young lady to make a bonfire of her manuscripts, and buckle to work of a more solid and enduring character in the eyes of every notable housewife. She did so, but—she still peeped out from behind the curtain.

Night by night when the room was full and every tongue was busy, a silent watcher, unknown to all, was drinking in the scene, and marking every trait of human nature which revealed itself.

The result was that the incorrigible propensity rose higher than ever; but whether Mrs. Burney was dead before the closet again beheld a flying pen and a rapt composer, or whether Fanny was

of an age to decide for herself in the matter, we know not; all we do know is that she was twenty-four or twenty-five years old when *Evelina* saw the light, and that although this was being surely young enough, there were not wanting admirers who sought to enhance the value of the production by spreading a report that the idol of the hour was only seventeen. Fanny was small and slight; probably she looked much younger than she was; moreover she was one of those clinging, affectionate creatures who are always thought of as 'little'. It was as his 'Little Burney' that the celebrated Dr. Johnson claimed an interest in the author of *Evelina;* as his 'Fannikin' that Crisp, her other godfather in the world of letters, hailed her. That such a timid, shrinking young maiden should dare to run the gauntlet of criticism and bid for public favour, shows that the just confidence of genius was not wanting in the present instance. Fanny Burney might be frightened to death at the thought of facing any one likely to divine her momentous secret,—but she was bent on testing the value of *Evelina* all the same. Her idea was to become, if possible, a candidate for fame without the risk of disgrace—in other words, to publish anonymously. Having found a publisher, she thought it her duty at length to inform her father of the step she was about to take.

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Can it be believed that all that Dr. Burney did was to burst out a-laughing, kiss his daughter, give her leave to do as she pleased in the matter, and never even inquire the name of the work? 'Happily,' records her biographer, 'this inexcusable neglect only caused the loss of twelve or fifteen hundred pounds.'

On the merits of the world-known volume, which is now recognised as one of the standard novels of England, there is no space here to enter. *Contrast* is its key-note. The effect of one passion discharging itself against another passion—like one storm-cloud against another storm-cloud — was what its writer revelled in. Perplexities and entanglements were to her mere vehicles for the betrayal of character and temperament. With the lightest possible touch she skimmed the surface of events. A few graphic lines place before us the London shops and streets, the London ball-room and opera house of the period: Madame Duval's bemired curls alone betray the state of the country lanes. We are caught up in a breath as it were—taken into the youthful heroine's confidence—espouse her cause (while yet provoked by her exaggerated timidity which borders on imbecility) —sympathise in her ordeals, whether in high or low life—participate in her mortifications—wish that Sir Clement Willoughby had not overheard

the vulgar locality whither Evelina's coach is to be driven, and share her agonies when Miss Polly Branghton announces to her sister that 'Miss has danced with a lord!'

Small wonder that the public, accustomed only to the ponderous sentimentalism of Richardson, or the rich but coarse drollery of Fielding and Smollett, went wild over a work which for piquancy, vivacity, and comedy, pure and simple, has never been surpassed—perhaps has never been equalled.

Evelina at once placed its author, as we have said, upon a pinnacle of fame. She was importuned to write again, to write at once, to write upon every conceivable topic, and through every imaginable channel. Her principal advisers in the matter counselled writing for the stage. She was offered valuable assistance as well as advice if she would consent to do so, and what doubtless turned the scale, Sheridan, the manager of Drury Lane Theatre, declared he would accept a play from her without even reading it. Thus encouraged Miss Burney wrote a comedy entitled 'The Witlings,' but it was never acted nor printed. Those who were in her confidence were too wise to permit a piece which was feeble and foolish throughout to mar the lustre of her former success, and she was informed of this in what she termed

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'a hissing, groaning, cat-calling epistle'. The response was worthy of Fanny's sweet disposition and temper. She owned herself disconcerted, but refused to be mortified, or '*downed*'; and almost immediately, as though to prove her words, set about writing another tale, which when given to the world under the title of *Cecilia*, was received with a fresh outburst of applause, amounting indeed to a perfect storm of enthusiasm. *Cecilia*, in the heat of the moment, was pronounced the best novel of the age. In this verdict posterity will, however, hardly agree, for to own the truth, it seems to our present taste intolerably complicated and longwinded.

The great charm of *Evelina* had been its simplicity—that simplicity was lacking in Miss Burney's second venture. Like all her literary contemporaries she now worshipped at the feet of Samuel Johnson, and to polish and prolong her sentences, so as to echo the roll of his resounding periods, was the *Ultima thule* of her ambition. She ceased to be herself. As the little 'Charactermonger' she had held a vast audience in thrall: and the same audience of the present generation endorses the verdict then unanimously bestowed — but when the little 'Charactermonger' began to write *Johnsonese* she could only command the approval of the age in

which Johnson lived. *Cecilia* had its day—but *Evelina* still lives.

It was many years before Fanny Burney wrote again. In an evil hour it chanced that she came into personal contact with her sovereign master and mistress, George III. and his spouse Queen Charlotte, and while yet at the zenith of her fame, their royal patronage fell like a deadly blight upon her happy young life, for she was offered—strange mischance!—a post in their household for which almost any other person in England would have been better fit. Inconceivable as it may seem, Miss Burney, a woman of distinguished genius, who could number among her friends the most talented Englishmen and Englishwomen of the period, was invited to discharge the duties of a waiting-maid, to pass her time in lacing and unlacing the royal bodices, and to be relegated for society to the companionship of an uneducated German hag who despised the very name of literature! Still more amazing is it to record that Miss Burney accepted the situation! 'She and her father,' says her biographer, 'were alike fascinated by the glamour which to some minds ever hangs about a Court.'

That the king and queen meant only kindness and that Fanny Burney always spoke of them with affectionate gratitude says nothing. The great

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times in which she lived, pervade all the works of this great English novelist, inaugurated a new era in English fiction. She was the first to write romances fit to be read in any decent household.

MARIA EDGEWORTH.

enthusiastic girl, and his noble mind and romantic disposition had considerable influence over her character. Her holidays were occasionally spent at his Surrey home, where we may presume he was cultivating little Harrys and Tommys, and telling them the inimitable stories to be found in his inimitable book. Thither Mr. Edgeworth's little daughter would often be sent between terms. Her real home was, however, in Ireland, and thither she, together with all the patriarchal household, finally retreated when in her sixteenth year.

And now began that curious epoch in her life which was of such incalculable benefit to her writings. Mr. Edgeworth, with his usual shrewd, practical wisdom, was far ahead of his times. He saw that the real grievance of the Irish tenantry was the 'middleman'; and with the assistance of his clever daughter he resolved to oust this obnoxious personage, to hear his people speak with his own ears, and himself administer justice in their midst.

Accordingly he appointed Maria his agent. She went and came, hearkened to all, inspected every inch and corner, weighed merits and demerits, and finally reported to her father. The result was that while the estate soon came to be known as one of the best managed in the county, the future novelist

had gained an almost unique experience. She had heard 'yarns,' and 'bulls'; had probed to the very depths the unsophisticated natures around her, had laughed with them and wept with them, gained their hearts and yielded hers in return.

Social intercourse of a more exalted nature was also open to her at this period. Several good country seats of the old-fashioned, hospitable, overflowing sort were to be found in the neighbourhood, to all of which Mr. Edgeworth's family were, of course, welcome, and Maria, as being the eldest, was probably taken rather more notice of than the numerous flock beneath her. In particular, the Lady Moira, a daughter of the noted Countess of Huntingdon, was of service in this respect; for not only did she introduce the young lady to society at once varied and brilliant while at Castle Forbes, a few miles off, but had her for a guest in her Dublin house, which was a noted resort for wits and grandees at the period. Maria was small of stature, and possessed of little claim to beauty, but though reserved towards strangers, she was, in appreciative circles, ready to talk with any one, and doubtless the flow of her wit would soon make forgotten the insignificance of her person and attire. At any rate Lady Moira 'took up' Maria Edgeworth, and doubtless to Lady Moira the world is indebted for much of the insight into

A period of rest had to be given in to, but eventually the danger was averted, and the busy pen worked away again, winning steadily year by year a stronger foothold on the ladder of fame. *Patronage* and *Harrington* are both remarkable works of fiction, and were regarded as such by all the judges of their day.

When their author would now and again quit her Irish fastness for the joys of travel, or of London literary society, she tasted the sweets of fame at every turn; but although delighting much in men and manners (though indifferent to the beauties of Nature—a curious lack in such a character), Maria was always eager to fly back to her green island, to the great brimming house, to her books, her library, and her poor peasantry for whom she had done so much. The duties, occupations, and interests she found there made each day all too short. Nor would she flee the chattering circle even when engaged in composition; she had so learned to abstract her mind that, as long as no one appealed to *her*, they might talk among themselves as much as they chose, and she could write contentedly in their midst.

Years thus passed, and it came to the last effort, *Helen*, a brilliant tale, disputed over by the critics, but considered by some to be equal to any of those gone before.

Maria Edgeworth did not write again. Yet at seventy she was as lively, alert, and vivacious as ever, setting herself to learn a new language, Spanish, and playfully hoping 'that if she lived to be eighty she might arrive at years of discretion'. She did live to be eighty-two, and then peacefully expired after a few hours' illness, on the same afternoon that she had been out driving in her customary health. On May 22, 1849, 'she rose,' says her biographer, 'from the banquet of life, at which, in her own words, she had been a happy guest'.

HARRIET MARTINEAU.

IV.—HARRIET MARTINEAU.

THERE is a phrase much used in England—and possibly in America—which precisely describes Harriet Martineau in her early years: she was 'a difficult child'. Strong characters like hers are apt to be 'difficult' in youth, and perhaps it is not too much to say that 'difficult' Harriet Martineau continued to be in maturity; certain it is that while possessed of some noble traits of character, such as earnestness, courage, and sincerity, she was inordinately self-willed, self-opinionated, and self-conscious. Nobody understood her, is the burden of her tale as told by herself in old age; and to this complaint it seems to me there is but one retort, she did not understand herself. She mistook her nature and disposition, and found the world at large to blame for much which lay in her own strange and wayward fancy. The three large volumes of autobiography which now lie before the writer exhibit, between the lines of every page, a personage possessed of powerful capacities, burning enthusiasms, and vehement affections, but at the

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same time prejudiced, bigoted, jealous, exacting, and inordinately egotistical. It is '*I, I, I,*' from morning till night, from year's end to year's end, with Harriet Martineau; and though it must be admitted that an autobiography without the '*I*' would be something like Lewis Carroll's 'grin without the cat,' yet there are two ways of telling even one's own story; so that the admissions of having been possessed of a temper 'downright devilish,' and of having a 'capacity for jealousy which was something frightful,' at the tender age of five, may be made with a zest and unction in middle life which are plainly indicative of the narrator's considering it something rather remarkable to be so distinguished in childhood.

It was in 1802 that Harriet Martineau was born, the sixth child in a family of eight, her parents being middle-class people residing in the town of Norwich, whose forbears were Huguenots come over from France, at the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The household would appear to have been a busy, industrious one. 'We could sew, iron, make sweets, gingerbread, and pastry, and keep order generally throughout the house,' records Harriet; but at the same time she is forced to add that of domestic management she knew nothing, and at much of the domestic work she was a bungler, 'always in terror of that great mountain

of duty before me, and wondering what was to become of me, if my mother left home, or if I should marry'. Harriet's mother, however, a fine, brisk, stirring matron, was not, it can be easily perceived, the woman to make friends with her 'ugly duckling' of a daughter. Harriet was plain, *gauche*, and generally speaking '*queer*'; her parents were not proud of her as they were of their more favoured offspring; she was wanting in tact, she was inconveniently truthful, would say things which were not meant to be said, and would adhere to her opinion in the teeth of authority or representation. Then she was, after a fashion—and a very poor fashion—extremely religious; not with the religion of Holy Writ, not with the mind 'which is in Christ Jesus,' but with a certain fierce fanaticism and superstition which did more harm than good in the family circle. How this phase of mind ended is a matter of history, and a sad one. It need not here be dwelt upon.

But what perhaps cut off the young girl more than anything else from sympathetic intercourse with her own kith and kin was the growing deafness which was to prove so miserable a barrier in after life between this remarkable woman and society. This deafness threw Harriet back upon herself in a manner that perhaps nothing else could have done, and made some occupation

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these subjects, and it is safe to allege that the bitter experience of 1825 paved the way for them in her heart.

About a year or two before, Harriet Martineau had begun to feel her way in literature. She was then just twenty years old, had emerged from the troubles of her childhood, was better friends with all around her, and had begun to appreciate the mother whom, during infancy, she had feared and dreaded.

Very modest was her first little venture into the world of letters. She had told her brother James —the 'oracle' of old—that when he returned to college (three years before her father failed) she should be miserable at home; and he had advised her to forget her feelings about the parting by an attempt at authorship. On the bright September morning, therefore, when she had seen him off by the early coach, she sat down to follow his advice; and the result was an article for *The Monthly Repository*—the Unitarian magazine—signed, according to herself, 'V,' but as the article in question may be seen by any one who cares to look for it in *The Monthly Repository* for October, 1822, signed 'Discipulus,' she must have forgotten; and this trifling detail may form a peg for me to hang a remark upon, namely, that Harriet Martineau's autobiography is not in all respects trustworthy.

She contradicts herself, forgets, and mistakes perpetually; wherefore I have come to the conclusion that though in intention the writer was all that was truthful and sincere, she was frequently rendered unjust and inaccurate by her own prejudices.

The little matter about 'Discipulus' was really of some consequence in its way, as this signature was intended to give, and did give, a distinct impression that the writer of the article was a man. The editor in the following month, in answer to correspondents, writes: 'The continuation of "Discipulus" has come to hand. His other proposed communications will probably be acceptable.' Moreover, in one of the 'Discipulus' articles, Harriet definitely figures herself as a masculine writer, speaking of 'our sex' (*i.e.*, the male sex) as a man would do. It is thus curious to note that Harriet Martineau adds another to the group of eminent women authors of this century, who assumed manly *noms de guerre* in order to obtain an impartial hearing for their earliest work.

After the 'Discipulus' essays came to an end, various other small attempts were made in the literary field, but Miss Martineau's writing was not recognised as a profession, nor looked upon as bringing 'grist to the mill,' till after the change in the family fortunes, and the death of her betrothed

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husband, Mr. Worthington, to whom she was much attached,—though she could calmly allow afterwards that, considering what she was in those days, 'it was happiest for both that their union was prevented'.

Thenceforth began Harriet Martineau's real literary career.

It began, however, on the lowest rung of the ladder. Two or three little eightpenny stories, which she had lying by her, were sent to a publisher named Houlston and accepted by him; and on its becoming known in the house that his letter in return contained five pounds, everybody wanted, and continued to want all day, to borrow five pounds of her! How true to Harriet is the little sarcasm! Soon after this the publisher wrote again for another story of somewhat more substance and bulk; whereupon he received *The Rioters;* and its success was such that some hosiers and lace makers of Nottingham sent Miss Martineau a request to write a tale on the subject of wages, which she did, calling it *The Turn Out.* At that time, however, she avers that she had not the remotest idea that she was meditating writing on political economy, the very name of which was then unknown to her, or conveyed no meaning. That her mind was forming for the task there can be no doubt, but she was herself unaware of it.

She continued to write penny tracts for Houlston, for which he paid a sovereign apiece—not at all bad payment, and affording evidence of their saleable qualities.

Presently Houlston died, and the next thing Harriet Martineau heard was that her little tracts, as well as some of her longer tales, were selling and circulating as Mrs. Sherwood's—Houlston having been that writer's publisher also! This was amusing. Next, her friends, having some of them gone to Houlston's shop in Paternoster Row to ask for any works by her, had 'foisted upon them any rubbish that was convenient'. This was not so amusing. Several pages of the autobiography are devoted to justifiable complaints of the trickeries of the house after the death of its founder. Meantime, in the autumn of 1827, an incident happened. Miss Martineau took up Mrs. Marcet's well-known *Conversations on Political Economy* and was amazed to find she had herself been teaching it unawares! It struck her at once that the principles of the whole science might be advantageously conveyed by being exhibited in their natural workings in social life. As she read, her cheeks glowed, and her mind expanded. Groups of personages rose up from the pages, and 'a procession of action glided through its arguments'. Sitting at work one bright afternoon at home, she

records Miss Martineau, 'my mother said with anxious kindness: "My dear, have you done?" "No, mother." On Saturday night she put her head in at my study door with: "My dear, have you done?" "Indeed I have not." Sunday came —my place taken by mail for Tuesday, no packing done, and my last chapter unfinished! The case seemed desperate. My mother stayed at home, and took every precaution against my being disturbed, but some one came on indispensable business, and did not release me till our early Sunday dinner hour. My mother looked anxiously in my face; and I could only shake my head. After dinner she mounted guard outside my study door. At five o'clock I flew down with the last sheet, with the ink still wet, in my hand.' Then follows the joyous congratulations of all, and a rush into the outer air for the first thorough holiday walk taken for nearly three years, when 'it felt like flying—the grass under foot, the sky overhead, the trees round about, all wholly different from what they had ever appeared before!' Some of us can enter into that glorious walk, with its transformation of every bush, and bird, and even of the common air!

Now came travel. Harriet Martineau set off for the United States of America immediately on the conclusion of her English political tales; her

fame had preceded her, and she received there the warm and gracious greeting which is ever accorded towards distinguished guests coming from the mother country. Public institutions were thrown open to her, and eminent citizens vied with each other both in public and private hospitality.

The one drawback to her triumphant progress was her outspoken sympathy with the anti-slavery movement, then in its infancy, and this courageous declaration on her part in many instances turned the tide of popular favour, but, to her honour be it spoken, although well aware of what she would encounter, she refused to palter, feeling that she 'could never be happy again' if she shrank from the duty of expression which was thrust upon her. As long as possible she held her peace; but when forced to speak, her utterances, especially her leading articles in the London *Daily News*, were so noble that it was said of her by Mr. W. E. Forster — the friend of Dickens — that 'it was Harriet Martineau alone who was keeping English public opinion about America on the right side, through the press'.

I must hurry on through all the years of active work which followed. It is impossible to give any sort of idea of the multiplicity of Miss Martineau's writings. Two exquisite little tales, *Feats on the*

Fiörd, and *The Billow on the Rock*, to my mind eclipse, in virtue of their moral tone and teaching, all besides. Indeed it is painful to recollect that the pen which could draw such a portrait as that of Annie Fleming in the last-named little gem of literature, should have let go her own hold on Christianity, and died in the sure and certain hope of—a peaceful annihilation! Indeed all through life it is to be feared Harriet Martineau lost herself in the mazes of religious doubt, and one can only suppose that she wrote the above during an interval of light.

Deerbrook, Miss Martineau's single work of fiction of any size, was not worthy of its author, and it is plain that her genius did not lie in that direction. Her strong mind could grasp the practical workings of schemes of profound importance, and throw over them the glamour of brilliant exposition—but she was devoid of that insight into human nature, and that perception of the humorous as well as of the pathetic, indispensable to the novelist.

One of the most remarkable women of her time, Miss Martineau was of course courted by the world, and might have commanded her own society, but it was not only her own deafness which made her care little about the hum of social gatherings; she had never been an amiable child, she could

never be an accommodating woman. She was impatient even of applause. To be 'lionised' irritated her beyond description; and it must be confessed that she does not even shine as a contemporary of her literary equals. Whether she were jealous of them, or whether she underrated them, she evinced nothing of the bright, frank spirit perceptible in so many of her sister authoresses; and although beloved in the family circle, and lamented by a vast concourse of readers, her end deprived the social world of no living personality.

As years passed, more and more did this wonderful writer wield the pen on behalf of the public welfare, and from her cottage on Lake Windermere, amidst the beauteous scenes and congenial atmosphere of that quiet retreat, she poured forth pamphlet after pamphlet, her interest in all public affairs remaining keen and unabated up to the very last day of her life.

A gentle illness prepared the way for death, and on the 27th of June, 1876, Harriet Martineau quietly passed away.

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JANE AUSTEN.

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world—yet she attained to a personal distinction which never fell to Jane's lot.' When Miss Brontë went to London, and walked through the famous Willis' Rooms on Thackeray's arm, lords and ladies were drawn up in two lines for the purpose of gazing at the author of *Jane Eyre.* Hundreds admired Miss Mitford's writings for one who ever connected the idea of Jane Austen with the press!

And here is a trifling incident pointing to the same density of appreciation. Some years ago a gentleman visiting Winchester Cathedral desired to be shown Miss Austen's grave. The verger, as he pointed it out, asked: 'Pray, sir, can you tell me whether there was anything particular about that lady; so many people want to know where she was buried?'

The comments of the visitors who came to Steventon, or Chawton (the Austens' final home), were amusing. One lady could say nothing better of *Mansfield Park* than that it was 'a mere novel'. Another owned that she thought *Sense and Sensibility* as well as *Pride and Prejudice* 'downright nonsense,' but expected to like *Mansfield Park* better, and having finished the first volume, 'hoped she had got through the worst'. One gentleman read the first and last chapters of *Emma* but 'did not look at the rest, because he had been told that

it was not interesting'. Another thought that such characters as old Mr. Woodhouse and Miss Bates were 'apt to become as tiresome in fiction as in real life,' and so on. The same things have been said by the same sort of people many times since Miss Austen's day, and we all know the speakers.

The criticisms of the common herd must, however, be taken as merely indicative of the slow growth of Jane Austen's fame. It was so far from being shared by those ahead of their times that the award of praise meted out to her by such men as Sir Walter Scott and Lord Macaulay was unmeasured, almost idealistic. Macaulay carried about with him, wherever he went, a complete set of the novels, adding each as it appeared; quoted 'Mrs. Norris' and 'Mrs. Bennett' as though they had been living and familiar personages; and on Miss Austen's death, contemplated writing a memoir with criticisms on all her writings, the proceeds of which were to be devoted to the erection of a monument in Winchester Cathedral. Scott records in his diary: 'Read again for the third time at least, Miss Austen's finely written novel, *Pride and Prejudice.* The big *bow wow* strain I can do myself like any now going, but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and

characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied me.' Southey writes: 'You mention Miss Austen. Her novels are more true to nature, and have, for my sympathies, passages of finer feelings than any others of this age.' Coleridge would burst into encomiums of Miss Austen's novels as being 'in their way perfectly genuine and individual productions'. Sydney Smith was wont to dwell with eloquence on the merits of each well-known character—'Fanny Price' being an especial favourite. The accomplished Lord Holland on his sick bed never wearied of having read aloud to him over and over again, 'those charming novels, almost unique in their style of humour,' and the well-known odd suggestion of the Prince Regent's librarian that Miss Austen should delineate in some future work the habits of life, character and enthusiasm of a clergyman who should be something like Beattie's Minstrel, had its origin in the Prince's request to have one of the works he so greatly esteemed dedicated to him. *N.B.*—This and an invitation to Carlton House were, however, the only attentions received from a Court which was not remarkable for its literary proclivities.

The particular reproach which inevitably fastens on all whose bent lies in the production of novels

of character, namely, that of having satirised their friends and acquaintances, was as a matter of course levelled at Jane Austen with unusual severity. Even her gentle, inoffensive nature did not save her from being held guilty of pinning down for study under the microscope such individuals as she deemed fit subject for her pen. It is waste of time to endeavour to refute such accusations, or to attempt to show that it was simply genius which evolved the creations which were accounted copies. A reviewer in the *Quarterly*, comprehending this difficulty, made public statement that he knew a man who went by no other name among his friends than 'Mr. Bennett,' yet the creator of 'Mr. Bennett' had never seen nor heard of him! Miss Austen wrote with an image in her mind, and it grew and perfected itself beneath her hand. Strange too it seems to remember that these living, breathing images took shape not in the solitude of the study, or the garret, but in the very midst of the busy home circle; that, sitting a little apart, with her writing-case upon her knee, the sister, daughter and aunt of one and another present, might be seen pursuing her task as though it were a simple, pleasurable occupation; and that she would rise to greet a guest, and lay aside the half-finished sheet, without a shade upon her clear, serene brow.

les smiled upon for his simplicity, or rated for ignorance.

V.B.—Advisedly we say 'his,' for be sure no inine spirit was ever found hardy enough to : the ordeal.

t is true that poetesses were rare then, as now : might almost be said rarer then than now—still, when one turns over page upon page of ings or invocations, however pure and exalted r strain, one cannot but marvel that an age ch was more than commonly productive of ity could be caught by mere pensive or pious sodies in which the mind bore but a slight . And, lest I be here accused of over-severity, uld at this point demand of my readers, both American and English nationality, the follow- : Can you recall on the spur of the moment the *names* of any of Mrs. Hemans's celeed longer poems? Her contemporaries talk er 'rich, chaste, and glowing imagery,' and n for her that 'it will be long before the chasm n our female literature by her death will be ily filled'.

is almost pathetic to read such lines in the f facts.

s. Hemans's name, it is true, survives, but he exception of a few short pieces, all her 'lie with her in the dust'. 'The Homes

of England;' 'The Rhine Song;' 'Casabianca;' and 'The Better Land' are still taught by mother to child, and still sound sweetly in the little one's ears—but we fear that Mrs. Hemans's own comment on the singing of the celebrated tenor, Stockhausen, that she never finds 'his silvery warbling leaves any more vivid remembrance on the mind than the singing of birds,' may with only too much justice be applied to much that she herself gave to the world.

It is time, however, to sketch something of the life and surroundings of our present subject; but so little is generally known of these that even denizens of her native place are, I fancy, to a great extent ignorant that Felicia Hemans, *née* Felicia Browne, was the daughter of a Liverpool merchant, and was born in the heart of that great commercial seaport in the year 1794. A less romantic birthplace for a queen of romance could scarcely be imagined; but although the grandmother of the poetess was of plain Lancashire yeomanry stock, it does not appear that she had otherwise any Lancashire blood in her veins, and an Irish father and Venetian mother doubtless transmitted to their children abundance of wit and sensibility even in the teeth of adverse circumstances.

To her descent from Doges of Venice—

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albeit at some distance—Mrs. Hemans was wont in after years half playfully, half proudly, to attribute the warmth of her imagination, and the romantic cast of her mind; for, indeed, her mother had retained and cultivated a taste for art and love of the beautiful seldom found in her station of life at the period. Poetic fire must have been deeply implanted in her breast not to have been quenched by the commonplace routine of a mercantile household, at a time when there was no mingling of ranks and professions as now, but when families engaged in trade seldom met, either in their business or in social intercourse, those whose interests lay in a wider sphere, or whose minds soared into higher realms. Their busy days of honourable toil permitted but scant time for recreation, and their intelligence, bent on the discharge of important practical duties, either shrank from or spurned the pleasures of the imagination. Yet such ungenial soil gave birth to a slight and lovely creature, to whom, if we cannot now accord the pedestal on which she once stood, we can at least ascribe very unusual gifts, and an exquisitely delicate and perceptive nature.

From earliest years the little Felicia Dorothea was a model of childish loveliness. Her complexion was remarkably brilliant, her pensive brow finely chiselled, and her hair long, curling, and golden.

In the latter years of her life 'its hue,' ad her biographer, 'deepened into brown, but remained silken, and profuse, and wavy to th last'.

When we find that to so much beauty th charming little creature united a loving, generou disposition and gave promise of the refined talent and attractions by which she was afterward distinguished, we are not disposed to wonder tha she was the idol of both parents, and indeed c brothers and sisters also.

A tender little plant cherished and nurture carefully, there was no need to conceal the bent o her infantile mind; and, although she would b unable to put into words much that made up th sum of her daily life, or to confide to others sucl strange ecstasies as stir the souls of those endowe with the poetic temperament even in infancy, ye the whisperings of 'thoughts which do often li too deep for tears' which would now and agair escape the dreamer, would meet with no harsl rebuff, no cold stare of contempt. Even tc strangers, there was something remarkable and uncommon about the little one, and they were not reticent in their expressions. 'That child was never made for happiness,' observed an incautious friend in the child's hearing; 'her colour comes and goes too fast.' Can we be surprised that the

poesy, and drew inspiration from sources unknown to ordinary mortals. On the events passing around her she threw a mantle of her own colouring. Her breath transformed the common air on which she lived.

Thus we find her idealising the war scenes of the Peninsular campaign in which a member of the family was taking part; dwelling with a sort of ecstasy on the romance and the chivalry of Spain; and cherishing as images for rapt contemplation, the camp, the march, the deadly skirmish, and the solemn roll-call. Her eye would kindle and her cheek glow as she spoke of heroism and glory. She had all the noble enthusiasm of the girl, joined to the fervid imagination of the poetess. 'Spain,' she wrote, 'is the subject of my thoughts and words—my dream by night, my vision of the day.' Yet although it was about this time that her first volume of early verses was given to the world, we do not find in these youthful compositions so much of the warlike *furore* as might have been expected; instead, there are elegant little birthday compliments, tender addresses to attached friends and relations, odes to parting, odes to meeting, odes to everything—the sort of effusions, in short, which were in vogue seventy or eighty years ago, and which probably all the young ladies of Miss Browne's

acquaintance were in the habit of penning as well as herself.

Her next collection marked a distinct advance, albeit pursuing the same line, and were published in the year 1812, the poetess being then just eighteen. Of this we are told that it was the only one of her works for which she 'had to taste the gall as well as the honey of criticism'. One unkind review indeed so much affected her as to confine her to bed for several days!

But in spite of adverse criticism it would have been well, perhaps, if Felicia Browne had confined herself to writing poetry, instead of entering into the bonds of matrimony at this tender age. Probably she had cast her own glamour over the soldier who woo'd and won her while yet on the very threshold of womanhood,—for although Captain and Mrs. Hemans lived together for a few years, and several sons were born to them, the young wife could scarcely have been more than four or five and twenty when what is termed a 'protracted separation' took place. Biographers are reticent upon the point. It is merely stated that the vicissitudes of military life, more especially the hardships endured in the disastrous retreat upon Corunna, had 'undermined Captain Hemans's constitution to such an extent as to render residence in a milder climate necessary,'—and

ıother stuff. The Bible, sermons, and a paper sufficed her; and accordingly the light-hearted lassie was free to run wild, and ıp what knowledge she could, during many of merry tomboyhood. By fits and starts, ver, the worthy Captain Fairfax, a bluff of the olden type, started up with a r of round oaths to a new view of the ct. 'This will *never* do!' etc., etc., etc.— y is growing up a perfect little *savage!*' etc., etc., the outcome being an idea which, what- its intrinsic value, was both original and rous: 'He made me,' sighed the poor little ıt and caged bird, 'read a paper of the *ıtor* aloud to him every morning!' A paper : *Spectator!* A long, dull, faultlessly written, ingly read paper! So terrible must have the ordeal to hearer as well as reader, that g it hardly answered its chief end either, the ıt sailor put forth another and a more strenu- ffort. He sent his little daughter for twelve hs to a highly recommended boarding-school, : neighbourhood of Edinburgh; and the record r sorrows and troubles there, is a painful one. school was a 'genteel' one; the girls were not '—they were 'young ladies'; the mistress an habitual frown which even the elder ones ed,'—and among them all they made the life

of poor little Mary Fairfax so intolerable that at length some, less hardened in folly and impertinence than the rest, themselves bathed her eyes to prevent her stern mistress from seeing that she was perpetually in tears. The school did not answer; and Mary was sent back to her Fifeshire home so little the better for it that on one occasion, enclosing a bank-note in an envelope to pay for some commissions she wished to have executed, she informed her correspondent that she sent therewith a '*bank-knot*'!

But we must not linger over the desultory and intermittent spurts of tuition which were at length accorded to the fair young maid; suffice it to say that she had now one teacher, now another—at one time the parish 'dominie'—(schoolmaster)—at another Nasmyth, the famous landscape painter —anon she was sent to a dancing school in Edinburgh, allowed to attend the theatre and see Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble,—next we find her and some other sprightly young misses taking lessons in cookery from a celebrated pastry-cook, and finally entertaining their dancing partners at supper, when jellies and creams compounded by their own fair fingers, went the round; 'although as far as economy went,' owns Mary Fairfax frankly, 'we might as well have bought them'. She was now seventeen years of age, and still

booksellers, and pastry-cooks. In Princes' Street may be seen the products of these three in their fullest perfection. But even as she sauntered, and flirted, and dropped in hither and thither to inspect or purchase, Mary Fairfax never forgot her problems, and records of this period: 'I never lost sight of the main object of my life'; so after recounting how her days were mainly passed either in society, or in cultivating elegant accomplishments, she proceeds:—

'I rose at daybreak, and after dressing, wrapped myself in a blanket from my bed on account of the excessive cold—having no fire at that hour—and read algebra, or the classics, till breakfast time.'

It was only for a brief epoch that such studies were permitted to pass unchallenged. While yet in her teens the radiant young beauty became a bride, and her marriage was for the nonce the death-blow to science, and to every other joy and ambition of her heart. She was 'mated to a clown,' a dullard, and a fool; who with no sympathy for any intellectual pursuit, and no opinion of the capacity of the feminine sex, was only annoyed to find his wife not so stupid as himself. Mr. Greig was a first cousin, and the union took place after a very short courtship. Had he lived, it is difficult to conjecture what his influence might ultimately have

been over Mary's scientific career, but, happily for the world, he died rather suddenly after she had undergone only a few years of monotonous, dejected wedded life; and the youthful widow returned with her two little boys from the confined area of a little dark London street to her happy northern home, right glad, one cannot help thinking, to behold its hills and dales once more.

She was now free—freer than she had ever been before—to pursue the bent of her mind. Extra candles were not needed in order to solve problems at dead of night, nor blankets to protect against the chill of breaking dawn, while poring over the algebraic page. It is not long before she notes that she has studied 'plane and spherical trigonometry and Ferguson's Astronomy,' and then comes the first outpour of her own strength, the first measuring of her powers against those of others. She solves a 'Diaphantine Problem'—(whatever that may be!)—and is awarded a silver medal, cast on purpose with her name. This success made at once all concealment of her studies impossible; nor was it, she relates, attempted. 'I was considered eccentric, and foolish, and my conduct was highly disapproved of by many . . . but as I was quite independent, I did not care for this criticism.' She now

of that? The house was clean, ample, cheerful: it contained three parlours, two kitchens, several odd nooks, and six good bedrooms overhead. Why, it must have seemed a perfect palace of delights to the poor, little, puny, pale-faced Londoners! They had a garden too—a straight-bordered, old-fashioned, well-planted garden, with a sun-dial and a summer-house—with espaliered walks, and plots of grass — the whole being encircled with a 'ha-ha fence'—that delightful bourne of former days — from an undulating meadow beyond.

And now behold our little Ann and Jane at play in this sunny spot! The two little girls in their funny little caps, and long straight frocks—so demure outwardly, so brimming over with merriment and mischief within! In those times people of the Taylor class knew nothing about nurseries and schoolrooms. The parents themselves took in hand both the bodily and mental care of their children; and eminently fitted as were Isaac and Mrs. Taylor to train and educate the young, they brought to bear on the task such energy and ability, that although accomplishments in the ordinary sense might not have been found, and would hardly have been in place in the Lavenham household, cultivation of the mind was carried on to an extent which enabled almost every individual

member of the group subsequently to attain distinction in his or her walk of life.

Space forbids my entering into their various powers and achievements, but the name of one sister, Ann, Jane's playfellow in childhood and beloved companion and confidante in after years, is so much interwoven with her own, that the joint author of *Original Poems* cannot be dismissed without a word.

Ann was indeed the first of the two—or of any of the family—to see herself in print. Having sent a set of verses to the *Minor's Pocket Book*, she had the triumph of hearing that 'Juvenilia' had won the prize for a poetic solution of an enigma, charade, and rebus; and that the prize consisted of six of the Pocket Books. Quite elated by such success, Ann speedily became a regular contributor, and it may be mentioned that all through life she continued to wield the pen, in the end for rewards somewhat more substantial than Pocket Books!

To return, however, to Jane Taylor's youthful days. The characteristic of her home life was industry. Idleness was not to be thought of where one and all were incited by the example of the father, and the watchful care of the mother. Even at meals, the excellent Mrs. Taylor would read aloud for the benefit of the assembled young-

press, while yet engraving was the order of the day.

Daily when the clock struck eight—at which hour the workshop closed—off went the bibs and aprons, and away flew the released apprentices, each to her own little attic, there to 'conjure up the little one' for whose benefit the verses were presumably to be composed. 'When imagination began to flag,' records Jane, 'I used to address my imaginary child thus: "There, love, now you may go".'

To wait till the witching hour of eight was not, however, always endurable. A pencil and paper had to be kept handy to catch the flying thought even while the etching and 'biting' was going on; and occasionally, 'in cases of extremity,' confesses Ann, 'when it was to be feared that all would escape me before night came, I have made a sudden exit, and in honest haste, and unintelligible scribble, pinioned the thought of fancy to the first piece of waste paper I could find, there to abide till happy evening'.

Later on, when literature unexpectedly became a profitable business, the sisters petitioned for an extra half-hour, and were unaffectedly rejoiced and grateful on obtaining it, but it illustrates the family habits that the concession was not sought, nor thought of, until writing for the press had become

really remunerative. Such writing was Ann and Jane Taylor's *Original Poems* and *Nursery Rhymes*, familiar to every English child of a former generation. There were few then who had not been called upon to recite the

> 'Will you walk into my parlour?'
> Said the Spider to the Fly;

or the tale of

> Honest John Tomkyns, the hedger and ditcher,
> Who, though he was poor, did not wish to be richer.

I forget in which well-known volume either of these poems occurs, but it is a somewhat curious fact that although Jane Taylor's name, according to Sir Walter Scott, became 'known to four continents,' many of the best specimens, oftenest quoted, are by her sister; and it was in reference to their being usually attributed to the more popular authoress, that Ann once observed with a sweetness of temper delightful to record: 'Dear Jane had no need to borrow what I could ill afford to lose'!

The eldest brother, Isaac the younger, now made his *début* in the world of letters, with two noble works, the *Elements of Thought* and the *Natural History of Enthusiasm;* while authorship being in the air, the mother, in her fiftieth year, and the

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:r who had hitherto shown no proclivities in direction, also entered the literary lists, and attained a marked success; indeed a ›lete catalogue of the writings of the gifted y—recruited presently by nephews, and in-law—amounts to ninety volumes. It is :sting to note that twenty-five of these are ibuted by the younger Isaac, who was the prolific, and only three by his sister Jane, was the least.

· some years brightening fortunes now made mily horizon smile, first in one rural home, in another. Ann Taylor took to writing eviews and treatises, while Jane began to er thoughts to the construction of a tale was finally given to the public under the · *Display*. *Display* is in its way a most te and perfect picture of English life under in aspect; the writing is exceptionally , terse, and vigorous, and the studies of :r inimitable. It was chiefly penned the semi-solitude of a winter spent on the coast, whither the two sisters had been der the escort of their brother Isaac, for fit of their health.

uccess of *Display* was immediate—I wish ıdd it was enduring. It is to me incom- ›le how so clever a piece of English

fiction has been permitted to fade out of sight, and I never pass an old bookstall or peer into an old bookshelf without purchasing any copy of *Display*, howsoever tattered and torn, that is there to be found for sale.

After her sister Ann's marriage, Jane Taylor was again, and happily, thrown upon her own resources; and the result was *Essays in Rhyme*, with which I can scarcely hope that any of my readers are familiar. Yet they are worth the being studied; and were penned, confesses their author, 'with such zest and excitement that even in the daily walks taken with others I was often quite abstracted from the scene before me'. *Essays in Rhyme* are for the most part pitiless exposures of the trumpery follies and weaknesses of human nature. Some of the passages are inexpressibly affecting; humorous satire is the characteristic of others. The present writer has many a time and oft made use of an apt, incisive couplet for the headings of her chapters, and been assailed from quarters innumerable to know whence it emanated. Here and there are solemn passages of great beauty, such as that beginning:—

> And yet amid the hurry, toil, and strife,
> The claims, the urgencies, the whirl of life—
> The soul perchance in silence of the night
> Has flashes, transient intervals of light. . . .

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The Contributions of Q. Q. was Jane Taylor's last and best-known book. The contributions had appeared in various magazines, and consist of short tales, sketches and poems—although bright and sparkling they cannot in my judgment compare with the *Essays in Rhyme*, for solid merit. Nevertheless there are in *Q. Q.* also, many scenes which imprint themselves upon the memory; and the young still read, and still love them.

Scarcely was this last production complete, when the health of the writer began prematurely to give way. One illness succeeded another; and while in the very zenith of her powers, and almost ere she had reaped the full fruition of her fame, Jane Taylor gently declined into her grave. All who care to know more about her, should seek information in *The Family Pen* (being memorials of the Taylor family),—in the *Autobiography of Ann Gilbert*, a quaint and thoughtful work in the olden style—and in the productions themselves of this most natural, most truthful, and most irreproachable writer of bygone days.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË.

For "Vilette" *read* "Villette"

IX.—CHARLOTTE BRONTË.

THERE is no more picturesque figure in the history of English fiction than that of Charlotte Brontë. The world is never tired of hearing of her; never weary of contemplating that lonely life lived out among the desolate moorlands, with its alternating episodes of strange and tragic interest in a foreign country. So readily has the public ear been bent to listen, that involuntarily biographers have sought to heighten the effect produced by revelations of the home-life of a singularly gifted and as singularly constituted family circle; and something of a lurid light has been thrown upon the bleak Yorkshire parsonage, and on the figure of the principal person who drew attention thither.

The Brontë family was sufficiently remarkable in itself to have dispensed with any need for exaggeration; but of the four who formed it—irrespective of their sole remaining parent—the author of *Jane Eyre* was, so far as can be gathered from those who had the best opportunity for

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judging, in disposition and temperament the least unusual.

Charlotte Brontë was a woman endowed with great talents and with deep and passionate sensibilities,—but she was not the weird creature depicted by some of her admirers; she was not a tithe as fantastic as her brother Branwell, nor as sternly peculiar as her sister Emily.

We will, however, let our readers judge for themselves whether or not there is not enough romance about the reality of this author's life, to make superfluous any deepening of the lines.

Born in 1817, every one now-a-days knows who and what Charlotte Brontë was. One of the six children of a shaggy Irish parson—a parson with a wit, and a temper—a cunning, crafty, cruel, almost intolerable temper; the one sensible act of whose life (if we except his marriage) would seem to have been his dropping his veritable and terrible patronymic of 'Prunty' for the more euphonious and harmonious 'Brontë'. Every one knows, further, that of these six children—soon to be motherless children—three were destined to fame, each in her own degree; and that vice alone would seem to have interfered between a fourth and a like reward.

Two elder daughters had sunk into an early grave ere anything beyond the merest infantile

buds of promise had been put forth by the younger ones, and therefore it is impossible to say whether or not Maria and Elizabeth might not also have won their spurs; but all who ever knew or dwelt within ken of Branwell Brontë were unanimous in their belief that genius was loudly asserting itself in the brief heyday of his youth and innocence, and that to the shame and sorrow of his lamentable career and early death, was added in the breasts of his family a deep-seated pang of regret for that future which had erst seemed in store for the only son and brother of the house.

To recount here any biographical details of Charlotte Brontë's early life would be superfluous. To trace her career as we have endeavoured to trace those of our other English authoresses in this series, would only make my readers impatient. The picture of the four lonely little ones bereft of their mother, neglected by their father, hustled out of the way by Tabby—the Yorkshire lass, semi-nurse, semi-cook, semi-everything—and utterly without amusement or playthings, has been set before the world time after time so vividly and so graphically that it is as familiar to us as a well-worn print or far-famed engraving. We know that then and there the little band, from sheer stress of circumstances, set to work to invent their own

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play, and that the play presently ran away with the players; the things of their own creation domineered over their creators,—until at length, years after, there came a day when Charlotte, busy upon her own absorbing secret, accidentally discovered that the shy Emily too had 'dared to commit her soul to paper'; and then and there Anne, 'blushing as was her wont, also poured some hidden treasures of the kind into her elder sister's lap'. Each had found the hidden springs whose waters, once tasted, are too sweet ever to be relinquished; yet strange to say, it was not the irrepressible desire to let loose the fountain and free the imprisoned thoughts with which each young bosom was full to bursting that impelled 'Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell' to their first great prose ventures. Their modest volume of poems —we scarce need mention it—had been a failure; and money—money, that all-penetrating spur—was urgently, desperately needed. To make money Charlotte Brontë wrote *The Professor*. And she defends herself, and rightly, for so doing. There was nothing degrading nor ridiculous in the project; neither would it seem in the slightest degree to have militated against the value of the book. But *The Professor* needed *Jane Eyre* to run before it. 'Rochester' had to pave the way both for 'Paul Emanuel' and 'Dr. John'. The poor

soiled and battered MS.—never refreshed by a new title-page nor a clean cover—would re-appear with cruel regularity and 'true to time,' after each despatch to a fresh publisher; until the very sight of the thick roll, 'defiled with another refusal,' must have made sick the heart of the courageous and undaunted girl, whose first thought nevertheless was ever: 'Where next?' All in vain; *The Professor* remained unpublished during the lifetime of its author. But *Jane Eyre* was begun under the very shadow of this failure.

A few kindly words, a promise of future consideration, and a suggestion as to the shape of a new venture, secured for one of the first publishing firms in London the inestimable privilege of possessing Charlotte Brontë's great work. It is a mistake to suppose that *Jane Eyre* went the round like the luckless *Professor*. The book was accepted at once; and though published anonymously, as we have said, it took the whole of England by storm. 'Reality, deep significant reality, is its characteristic,' wrote George Lewes in *Fraser*. 'It is a book to make the pulses gallop and the heart beat,' came from the *Atlas*. What the *Quarterly Review* said is almost too well known to need repetition, as the woman who 'for some sufficient reason had long since forfeited the society of her own sex' has since had her

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se espoused and her traducers scathed and ivelled up, by a score of pens like penknives.

Yet the present writer may mention that not g ago she found at Haworth that copy of the *rterly* for December, 1848, among the poor isures once possessed by Martha Brown—(the w girl' who, as years went by and Tabby grew was admitted to assist at the parsonage)— that its worn and blackened pages mutely ified to the truth of the young writer's laration of how deeply the cruel words thereon cut into her soul.

'erhaps also it may not be out of place here to erve that *Jane Eyre* is in no sense a book the young, and that even older girls would do to consult a parent, or elder reader, before isal.

'he account of Charlotte Brontë's first visit to publisher, with whom she had hitherto only esponded under her *nom de guerre* of 'Currer ,' is entertaining. By accident she had disered that an idea was afloat regarding the k which was in everybody's hands, an idea t distressing to her generous nature. It said that the new writer had satirised Mr. ckeray under the character of 'Rochester,' and even in the plot of *Jane Eyre* obtruded on sorrows of his private life. Inexpressibly

shocked by such a supposition, Charlotte Brontë took the night train to London, and accompanied by her sister Anne, walked off through the bewildering uproar of Cornhill to the familiar but hitherto unexplored address. Arrived thither, all was not nevertheless smooth sailing. An unknown visitor see the head of the house? Take up his precious time with her trivial concerns, presumably with some silly schoolgirl's efforts, which had best be quashed in the birth? No, indeed! But it chanced that the great man himself passed through the shop, and had pointed out to him the pertinacious young lady visitor.

We can picture for ourselves the frown which would accompany his curt demand, 'Young woman, what can you want with me?' 'Sir, we have come up from Yorkshire. I wish to speak with you privately. I wrote *Jane Eyre*.' How the words must have startled, and, moreover, carried with them their own conviction of being the truth! '*You* wrote *Jane Eyre?*' cried Mr.——, staring as though he had seen a ghost—and thenceforward all was easy. The young ladies were ushered into the private sanctum, and only permitted to depart thence to be driven to the house of their new friend's mother, who was proud to be honoured with the charge of such guests. Life would have seemed to be opening its brightest portals at such

oment; and indeed as far as public fame and gnition went, Charlotte Brontë had never thing left to wish for at its hands.

ut in her own home the shadows were heavy lengthening. Branwell was already dead; sisters had seen all his genius wrecked and his high promise blasted, long ere he sank into early and dishonoured grave,—and swiftly owed the loss of Emily, and then of Anne, h distinguished by its own peculiarly harrowing umstances. Charlotte alone was left; and it is bable that it was to fill 'the silence made' and shut out the sad scenes which must have been constantly before her eyes, that she soon after gan to write again, and this time in a different n. Having had her heart wrung by so many onies, she would for very relief seek a lighter me for her new work of fiction; wherefore, hough at no computation can *Shirley* be termed bright and sparkling story, it is more healthy-nded, wholesome, and ordinary in its tone, than her *Jane Eyre* or *Vilette.*

The new book was received with 'an outcry of ise,' even from those who had condemned predecessor. *Shirley* is brimful of masterly etches of life and character; it is witty; it is tertaining; it is full of vivacity and force—but is not great. Assuredly it would never have

struck home, and penetrated to the quick in the souls of its readers, had it not been for the gimlet, as it were, of *Jane Eyre.* There is a kind of dreadful power about the one which is lacking in the other. This is the more strange in that, during the interval which had elapsed between the production of each, Charlotte Brontë had, in Carlyle's phrase, 'lived much'. Suspense, shame, and horror, and one long martyrdom of disenchantment had been succeeded, without a moment's intermission, by tenderer and more agonising griefs. In those few years all who had shared her first aspirations and ambitions had been severed from her, struck down in the flush of their youthful genius; and blow had followed blow in such swift succession that there had scarce been time to mourn and weep; the very sob of sorrow upon her lips for the one, had been frozen in the start of anguish for the next.

Of all the promising band she now alone remained; and with infinite sweetness and patience we find her striving to bear in her own tender, fragile person, the brunt of the hard life which seemed in store for the two left in the desolated home, and finding her chief solace in filial devotion and the energy of the mind. *Shirley*, as we have seen, was the outcome of the latter; and one would wonder to find it breathing a brighter, calmer spirit

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than those penned under more apparently favourable auspices, were it not permissible to suspect that there were other reasons, and powerful ones, why the inner life, though rudely torn and buffeted, should by this time have regained an equilibrium it had not before. Brussels, with its dear and doubtful delights, its enthralling hold on the imagination—we can scarcely call it the heart—of a simple girl, was no longer with her the place of places. It was receding into a memory; the tumult had subsided in Charlotte Brontë's soul.

No doubt the trials and sorrows of her own home had done their part towards driving forth the more purely personal trouble; and 'Lucy Snowe,' instead of growing ever sadder and lonelier, was emerging into the sunlight of tranquillity and resignation. Hence a more hopeful, breezy, and by comparison—though only by comparison—commonplace book. Observe also we have in *Shirley* no hero—neither of the Moores can for a moment rank as such—and neither have we Charlotte herself for heroine; 'Shirley' it has always been determined, was the author's conception of her beloved sister Emily; and Caroline Helstone of her intimate friend Miss Ellen Nussey. This has its hidden meaning for those who can interpret, and bears out the supposition that Charlotte Brontë was less self-engrossed—more disposed to look

abroad for her characters and incidents than to study the workings of two souls severally acting and re-acting upon the other—than she had been.

True, in *Vilette* again appears this strange recurrence to a dominant idea, and—nay, perhaps in consequence—we have together with the idea, the same power, though chastened and restrained by cultivation, which held fast the readers of *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte was again out of health and out of spirits, downcast and lonely, fretted and harassed by anxiety, whilst *Vilette* was in progress. This is quite sufficient to account for its gloomier note. As a work of art it may be as 'immensely superior' to her first published tale as some of its critics have pronounced it—but it will never be as dear to the heart of humanity. *Vilette* will live; it will live as long as human beings have passions to struggle with, temptations to overcome, hearts to beat; but for the young and thoughtless, the ordinary novel reader, it is written too entirely in the minor key to be wholly satisfactory.

But now a happier epoch appeared to be about to set in for the author. There had lived for some years at Haworth as curate to her father, a quiet, simple, unobtrusive gentleman, who had formed for the rector's daughter an attachment, of which for some time she knew nothing. It is affecting to read that when made aware of its existence, her

first emotion was one of self-reproach; she had thought herself a solitary creature, with scarce a relative, and only here and there a friend,—and behold! a noble, pure, devoted love, and one, moreover, of steadfast growth and long standing, offered for her acceptance!

Mr. Nicholls, moreover, loved and admired the woman—not the novelist. Charlotte, who could not be insensible to the homage now universally paid to her genius, was touchingly alive to the fact (for so she considered it) that much of this homage was due to curiosity, 'and curiosity not of a very pleasant or flattering kind'. She valued it; but her feminine nature yearned for something more, some other kind of appreciation. In her lover she found the very emotions thirsted after; her womanly instincts were satisfied; her new-found happiness was frankly acknowledged; and all might have gone well, had not the bitter jealousy and selfish paternal affection of old Mr. Brontë intervened for some time to prevent the union of the lovers. Ultimately, however, the patience and worth of Mr. Nicholls and of his daughter, brought their own reward; and although Charlotte could write that 'Compassion and relenting is no more to be looked for from papa, than sap from firewood,' the marriage took place; the father, with

characteristic waywardness, being all at once as eager to press on the wedding, as he had first been to prevent it.

On the 20th of June, 1854, Charlotte Brontë became a bride; on the 31st of March, 1855, she was bidden to the marriage feast above.

It is probable that original delicacy of constitution caused an ordinary illness to end fatally, since its first symptoms excited no apprehensions in the breasts of those around the sufferer—but death drew on apace, and there are still living inhabitants of the little Yorkshire village, who tell, with hushed voices, the tale of those two processions to the old churchyard, which took place within a few brief months of each other.

For six years, the bereaved father and husband continued to live on as father and son in the desolate home, the latter ministering with the most dutiful care and affection to the former, united in one beloved memory, and drawing ever closer together in spirit, as the old man neared his own end—a touching picture of the last days of Haworth parsonage considered as a shrine of genius. Then the aged rector was himself laid at rest beneath the sighing alders in the moorland churchyard, and Charlotte Brontë's widowed husband left the place, never to return. The parishioners, we learned, when recently visiting

the spot, would fain have kept Mr. Nicholls among them—he had laboured faithfully and was much beloved—but church patronage interfered, and the incumbency was bestowed on a stranger. It seemed a pity that this should be so.

With regard to Charlotte Brontë's writings we would thus sum up. It is probable that *Shirley* will pass away. *The Professor* has already passed, *Vilette* will remain, but remain as '*caviare* to the general'. But *Jane Eyre?*

Charlotte Brontë's own name will one day resolve itself into the name of *Jane Eyre.*

ELIZABETH GASKELL.

X.—ELIZABETH GASKELL.

A WRITER who lays a solemn injunction upon her descendants not to give to the world any account of her life and works in the shape of a memoir, does herself an injustice, and her memory an injury. Elizabeth Gaskell, no doubt from motives of pure humility and modesty, committed what we cannot help regarding as this mistake; in consequence of which it is with difficulty that any reliable details regarding her literary career can now be gathered, and the present writer had to apply personally to a relation when penning this paper, in order to obtain her Christian name! Even a charming little simple letter by the distinguished authoress, penned at the age of sixteen, which was recently placed in my hands, is only signed 'E. C. Stevenson'.

Mrs. Gaskell's Christian name was, however, 'Elizabeth Cleghorn'. I also learn from the same source, that she was born in 1810, and that although generally supposed to be a native of the 'North Countree' and claimed by her

'dear, busy, earnest, noble-working Manchester' as its own, Elizabeth Stevenson was born in Chelsea, that quaint old portion of London which is associated with more than one great name; and which, in the early part of the present century, was a pleasant spot, with shady walks and many a peaceful outlook.

Mr. Stevenson was, at the time of his little girl's birth, keeper of the Records to the Treasury, being a man of remarkable talents and attainments. Of Elizabeth's mother little or nothing is known, as she died very soon after the birth of this her only child; and doubtless it was in consequence of such a bereavement that the motherless little one was transferred in her tenderest years to the charge of an aunt, dwelling in the old-fashioned county town of Knutsford, which presently had all its fashions, customs, traditions, and whimsicalities presented to the world under the garb of *Cranford*. Knutsford is still the delight of the antiquarian and of the lover of bygone days. A Cheshire town, it preserves the curious old gabled, black-beamed houses familiar to many of my readers in pictures of Chester and Shrewsbury; while within these are to be found the carved wainscotting and panelled staircases associated with periods of romance.

In this mediæval spot Elizabeth grew up into a

beautiful and spirited girl; and scarcely had womanhood begun, ere she was wedded to the Rev. William Gaskell, a well-known and highly-respected Unitarian minister, to whose Manchester home the youthful bride was thenceforth transferred. It must have been a change—it could hardly have been a pleasant change—of scene. Knutsford, odd and humorous as it has been depicted, was and is, nevertheless, an aristocratic little place—it is at any rate the rallying point of the most aristocratic of English counties—and even although our young authoress and her people did not take rank with the great folks of the neighbourhood, they must have enjoyed much that was agreeable in the way of society. Manchester, at the time whereof we write, had scarcely any kind of society. Things have altered during the past fifty years, and now no one need be at a loss in any of our great commercial centres; but at the period when the Unitarian minister of Cross Street Chapel took his young wife to share his labours, we cannot fancy she found herself amidst congenial surroundings—at any rate at the outset.

But, within her own home, a cheerful contented girl was applying herself with all the sweet adaptability of her character to learning her part in life; to training her children, strengthening the hands of her husband, and so ordering the ways of

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her household that it might have seemed as though there were neither time nor inclination for any further interests. The unknown talent slumbered within the soul.

Then all at once it broke out. The only son, the darling of the family, was taken from its midst, and sorrow, as it has often done before, loosed the bonds of the imagination. As a relief for her thoughts, Mrs. Gaskell allowed them to flow into another channel, and doubtless with a keen sense of pleasure, discovered herself creating scene after scene of *Mary Barton*. This was in the year 1847, consequently, when the writer was thirty-seven years of age. It is interesting to note that we have thus the outcome of a mature mind, albeit of a young author, and that the work which still stands out pre-eminently as that by which Elizabeth Gaskell's name and fame were made, was not the crude outburst of a youthful enthusiast, but owed its birth to the deliberate convictions of one well versed in her theme. *Mary Barton* secured the warm admiration of all the leaders of literature in a great literary period, and was at once and for ever placed among the standard novels of England. In respect to it, nevertheless, we must add again the word of caution ; it is not a book for the young. It is 'strong meat for men' not 'milk for babes'.

As we have no means of knowing in what

succession *Cranford*, *Sylvia's Lovers*, *North and South*, etc., etc., were published, we can only attempt to give our readers some idea of their relative and distinctive merits.

Cranford stands by itself as Mrs. Gaskell's masterpiece of bright, witty, pathetic, exquisitely tender and dainty still-life. It is one sly smile—yet withal an indulgent smile—from beginning to end. How deliciously funny, for instance, is the excitement of the dear, prim, little spinster Miss Matty, over the prospect of having a *turban*, she 'having heard that turbans were worn'! And her avowal, that though she was perhaps too old to care about dress, yet as some of the country families were to be present at the gala in prospect she would 'like to look tidy,' appeals to the sympathy of every true woman. We really cannot help sharing her meek disappointment when, after all, no turban is forthcoming—but let me quote the words of the delinquent who had been entrusted with the commission :—

'I was most particularly anxious to prevent her from disfiguring her small, gentle, mousey face, with a great Saracen's head turban; and, accordingly, I bought her a pretty, neat, middle-aged cap, which, however, was rather a disappointment to her, when, on my arrival, she followed me into my bedroom, ostensibly to

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poke the fire, but in reality to see if the sea-green turban was not inside the cap-box with which I had travelled.

'It was in vain that I twisted the cap round on my hand, to exhibit back and side fronts; her heart had been set upon a turban; and all she could do was to say with resignation in her look and voice: "I am sure you did your best, my dear. It is just like the caps the ladies in Cranford are wearing, and they have had theirs for a year, I daresay. I should like to have had something newer, I confess—something more like the turbans Miss Betty Barker tells me Queen Adelaide wears—but it is very pretty, my dear. And I daresay lavender will wear better than sea-green. Well, after all, what is dress that we should care about it? I suppose turbans have not got down to Drumble yet?"'

After all this, think how heart-rending it must have been for the injured Miss Matty to reconnoitre the lecture hall through her spectacles presently, and detect that she *had* had grounds, excellent grounds, for her vexation, which, however, only found vent in the gentlest reproach, the whisper in a kind, mild, sorrowful tone, of 'You see, my dear, turbans *are* worn'.

Mrs. Forrester and her fine old cobweb lace, and the means she took of making her old tabby-

cat restore the involuntary theft thereof, is also one of *Cranford's* miniature gems. Pussy had lapped up the milk in which the rare old lace had been washed, and the lace had also gone down, much to pussy's discomfiture. 'At first,' recorded the narrator, 'I pitied her, and said "Poor pussy, poor pussy!" till all at once, I saw the cup of milk—empty, cleared out. "*You naughty cat!*" cried I; and I believe I was provoked enough to give her a slap, which did no good, but just helped the lace down.' Strong measures were then resorted to in the shape of a tartar emetic, mixed with red currant jelly, and the rest of the tale is thus told: 'I shall never forget how anxious I was for the next half-hour. I took pussy to my room and spread a clean towel on the floor. I could have kissed her when she returned the lace to sight. Jenny had some boiling water ready, and we soaked it, and soaked it, and spread it on a lavender bush in the sun, before I could touch it again, even to put in milk. But now, your ladyship would never guess it had been in pussy's inside.'

Of such incomparable touches *Cranford* is full; while the sweetest and tenderest notes are here and there hovered over, in passages of such rare beauty as would in themselves have lived, even had the tale possessed no other claim to notice.

In *Sylvia's Lovers* we have Mrs. Gaskell in a vein so altogether different, that it is hard to imagine the one pen wrote both novels. Throughout the latter, indeed, there flows a spring of north-country humour of the unconscious yokel kind—such as when the quondam sailor gives as his reason for not going to America in the time of war, that he 'could na stomach the thought o' being murdered in his own language'; or the resolution of a testatrix to have her will headed, 'In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,' under the impression that this would make it more valid; but, on the whole, the strain is sober, and but seldom relieved, especially towards the close, by lighter tints.

Mary Barton, *Ruth*, *North and South*, all belong to the same order of fiction as *Sylvia's Lovers*. The first, as has been already said, is the one by which Mrs. Gaskell will best be known to posterity; it is in its way an almost perfect picture of a certain state of life with all its sufferings and temptations, and the other three are but variations of the same theme.

Wives and Daughters, the last work which fell from the pen of the gifted authoress, is confined to an entirely different sphere, and though widely read and appreciated, does not, to my view, approach, either in power of delineation or in

description, any of its predecessors. It is amusing and sprightly; there are excellent scenes in it; and one character in particular, that of the village doctor's wife (the ex-governess of the noble family of the neighbourhood), is drawn with such an unerring touch that one cannot but fancy it must have been taken from life; but, on a whole, it only serves to illustrate the fact that Mrs. Gaskell is happiest in depicting humble life. Fortunately for her fame, she chiefly confined herself to that class with which she had most to do, and let the other alone.

Wives and Daughters, as my readers probably know, was left with its last chapter unwritten. The hand which should have traced it was laid at rest for ever before the last part appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine*, in which it was running as a serial; and though what the conclusion would have been may be easily divined, such a pathetic circumstance bears its own testimony to the value of finishing any piece of work in its entirety before presenting it to the world.

Among Mrs. Gaskell's shorter tales, *Libbie Marsh's Three Eras* takes the lead. This is one of the most dramatic little stories ever penned by any hand. It could only have been written by one *who knew*, who had witnessed, and pondered over, and entered into the very heart of the matter.

Let me recall one passage: –

The poor, toilsome denizens of the vast throbbing workshop of England, 'ugly, smoky Manchester—dear, busy, earnest, noble-working Manchester,' had had their one holiday of the year, and the long joyous day among the Dunham woods was at an end. 'The heat declined; the birds once more began their warblings; the fresh scents again hung about plant and tree and grass; and the boat-time drew near. As they trod the meadow-path once more, they were joined by many a party they had encountered during the day, all abounding in happiness, all full of the day's adventures. Long-cherished quarrels had been forgotten—new friendships formed. Fresh tastes and higher delights had been imparted that day. . . . We have all of us our look now and then, called up by some noble and loving thought (our highest on earth), which will be our likeness in heaven. That look was present on many a hard-worked, wrinkled countenance, as it was turned backwards to cast a longing, lingering gaze on Dunham woods, fast deepening into the blackness of night, but whose memory was to haunt, in greenness and freshness, many a loom, and workshop, and factory, with images of peace and beauty.'

This is Mrs. Gaskell at her best. There is no criticising such a passage as this.

It only remains to add one word more. So far as we are aware, the only biographical work which was ever published by this distinguished authoress was *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, a brilliant and artistic composition, but one which has unfortunately been proved so indisputably to be unreliable, that perhaps the best excuse which can be put forward on its behalf is, that it is sometimes hardly possible for a masterly writer of *fiction* to be also a masterly writer of *fact*. Certain lights evolved from such an one's own imagination cast their glamour over every subject and enwrap it. Mrs. Gaskell died in 1857, in the meridian of her fame, and whilst many years of busy and successful literary life might still have been predicted for her. A new edition of *Cranford*, with a preface of interesting reminiscences by Mrs. Thackeray Ritchie, has just been published.

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ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

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XI.—ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

'A SLIGHT, delicate figure, with a shower of dark curls falling on either side of a most expressive face; large tender eyes, richly fringed by dark eyelashes; a smile like a sunbeam, and such a look of youthfulness that I had difficulty in persuading my friend that the translatress of Æschylus was in technical language "*out*";'—such is the early description given of Elizabeth Barrett—not yet known to the world as Elizabeth Barrett Browning—by her friend and sister authoress, Mary Russell Mitford. Many years after this portrait was penned, we have it thus confirmed by W. W. Story, the sculptor: 'Her slight figure seemed hardly enough to contain the great heart which beat so fervently within, and the soul that expanded more and more as one year gave place to another. It was difficult to believe that such a fairy hand could pen words of such ponderous weight. Her face and head almost

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lost themselves in the thick curls of her dark brown hair. That jealous hair could not hide the broad, fair forehead, "royal with truth," as smooth as any girl's, and "too large for wreath of modern wont".'

And this fragile creature, this tender sensitive plant, this finely strung ethereal being, whose nature was as beautiful as her person, and whose character purified by years of suffering became most rarely noble and exalted, wrote that burning poem *Aurora Leigh!* At first sight such a work from such a source would seem unnatural. *Aurora Leigh* is a brilliant work of genius, it is overlaid with impassioned assaults upon men and things, it is masterly in its language, and scathing in its satire—what has it to do with a pale little woman whose life had been chiefly passed betwixt the pillow and the invalid carriage, who knew nothing of the turmoil of life, its necessities, requirements, and ordeals?

A closer perusal, however, of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's great poem—the work that placed her at once and for all time on a pedestal of her own among England's honoured names—reveals to us much that at the first blush was unintelligible. Mrs. Browning wrote not from knowledge, but from imagination. Imagination with her supplied

every lack; and evident as are the shortcomings on every page of her writings, the poetess by the sheer fervour of her imaginative genius makes us forget them all.

It has long been determined that in *Aurora Leigh* Elizabeth Barrett Browning gave forth the long-pent thoughts and feelings of her childish self; and certainly the passages which deal with the youthful Aurora's first impressions of her stolid English home and its accompaniments, are instinct with reality; they seem as though they must have been the outcome of bitter, haunting remembrance. The later books of the poem, however, favour the idea that the author had gradually glided out of *herself*, and yielded to the promptings of poetic fire, without the spur of a long-cherished desire to free her soul at length from bondage. Ruskin has accounted *Aurora Leigh* 'the noblest monument of modern English poetry'; Barry Cornwall asserted it to be 'a hundred times over the finest poem ever written by a woman'; while Landor had 'no idea any one in this age was capable of so much poetry'. Whether or not these verdicts would have been the same had they been delivered five-and-thirty years after the work was published, cannot of course be ascertained,—but at any rate such was the judgment of literary England at the time, 1856, when *Aurora Leigh* first saw the light

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—having, by-the-way, narrowly escaped destruction on its way from Italy; the box in which the MS. had been packed having been lost sight of at Marseilles, and only recovered after it had lain for some days in a cellar beneath the Customs there!

It has been said that 'no writer approaching the eminence of Elizabeth Barrett Browning has been so little written about,'—but in truth, while surveying the quiet, uneventful career of this gifted woman, it is difficult to find anything about which to write at all! For years and years hers was the routine of chronic invalidism; and though from her weary couch and sleepless pillow there emanated poems of the most exquisite beauty, and thoughts of the most marvellous brilliancy and power, into those lines there passed all that transformed the calm monotony of her outward existence, and made her quiet chamber a little heaven on earth.

Born in London on the 4th of March, 1809, Elizabeth Barrett Barrett (for so the future poetess was christened) was from infancy a delicate child, much given to solitude and pensive musings; while an accident with which she met at the age of fifteen, and which injured her spine, intensified every common ailment; so that ill-health and confinement seem to have been

contemporaneous with the earliest dawnings of womanhood.

Cut off from many of the pursuits and enjoyments of her age, reading and writing became more and more with her the one mode of passing the day; and she records that during the chief part of her time at Hope End, the home of her childhood, her retirement was scarcely broken save by books, and her own thoughts. 'There I had my fits of Pope, and Byron, and Coleridge, and read Greek'—(in which she had had the good fortune to be instructed by the blind scholar, Hugh Stuart Boyd)—'as hard under the trees as some of your Oxonians in the Bodleian'; whilst at the same time continuously striving to transmute into poetry the 'thoughts that so often lie too deep for tears' in her own bosom. She confessed that poetry was 'a distinct object with her'.

It is not surprising therefore that as early as the year 1825, that is, when Elizabeth Barrett was just twenty-one years of age, she contributed fugitive verses to some of the periodicals of the day, and that four years afterwards we find her attempting a bolder flight with a volume of her own.

This book was entitled *An Essay on Mind*, from the leading piece; and although neither it nor the

shorter poems included, gave in any degree promise of what was to follow, yet they could not be held altogether of no value. Elizabeth herself knew that there were good things in them;—I fancy she liked them better than her translation of *Prometheus Bound*, of which she asserts that 'it was written in twelve days, and should have been thrown into the fire afterwards, as the only means of giving it warmth!'

This translation was published in 1833, by which time Elizabeth was the confirmed invalid elder daughter, and doubtless also the principal personage of the establishment; for the gentle mother had faded away some years before, and, of all his numerous family, she was her father's favourite child. We can imagine that round her couch the most part of the family business would be transacted; that within her little chamber family councils would take place; and that into her sympathetic, affectionate and disengaged ear many a family confidence would be poured. The invalid who is a prolonged, patient, *acclimatised* invalid, is often a very useful and important member of a household. One who is always on the spot; who never has affairs of his or her own to attend to; who is rarely preoccupied, and at any rate can always be caught and caged, becomes of extreme value to brothers and sisters

aflame with their own interests, and absorbed in their own concerns.

Apart from this living in the lives of others, however, Elizabeth Barrett knew nothing of the world; and, in consequence, was thrown more and more back upon a world of her own.

Ah! but it was a glorious world! It began to bear glorious fruit.

Rapidly now emanated from her pen poem after poem,—odes, lyrics, stanzas of one kind and another—some simple and tender, others of surpassing power and pathos; until in the spring of 1844 appeared two fresh volumes, having the *Drama of Exile* for their initial piece. Of this poem, intended by Elizabeth Barrett to be her strongest work, it need only be said that in spite of some magnificent passages it is now generally recognised as a failure. It is a dull and wordy performance; and it is scarcely to be wondered at that it found a publisher with difficulty.

Lady Geraldine's Courtship, a favourite from the beginning, still holds its own in popular estimation, and deservedly fared better at the hands of the public.

We learn that to Miss Mitford, with whom Elizabeth Barrett was now on terms of close and affectionate intimacy, was due the recitation

of the original legend upon which the poem was founded, and it is also averred that the whole, making forty-two octavo pages, was composed within the space of twelve hours, 'written off' says one, 'at electric speed, in order to make up the number of sheets required by the American publisher of the poems'.

There is much in *Lady Geraldine's Courtship* to bear out this assertion. It is written in a strain of impassioned eloquence; and a torrent of fine imagery carries the reader along by its impetus, leaving him neither time nor breath to note anything beside, until the last page is reached,—and yet the whole will scarcely stand the test of a re-perusal. It is meagre in conception; destitute of even the semblance of probability; and displays at every turn the absolute unacquaintance with life natural to one whose days were passed in hearing of it from others, or in forming pictures of what it might be from her own dreams. Poured forth red-hot, and transmitted while the ink was barely dry to the printer's hands, what chance had reason and judgment to assert their claims?

But whatever shortcomings may be found in *Lady Geraldine's Courtship* some of the miscellaneous poems which appeared at the same time are almost beyond praise, and are too well

known for me to do more than mention their names.

The Lay of the Brown Rosarie, The Cry of the Human, The Dead Pan, The Romance of the Swan's Nest,—all of these have long since had their various niches assigned them in the hearts of all true lovers of poetry.

We now come to the romance of Elizabeth Barrett's own life—and as a good many of my readers are aware, that romance appeared, as romance not infrequently does, at the very most unlikely moment, and through the very most unlikely channel!

The poetess had settled down to her lot. She had accepted with the resignation of a gentle and holy spirit such deprivation of health and strength as seemed good in her Maker's eyes; she was making the most of the wondrous gift which was in itself a compensation for much which had to be foregone; and, doubtless, nothing in her eyes (as also in the eyes of those about her) was less likely to happen than the appearance of a lover, and the prospect of matrimony.

Matrimony, however, which meant leaving behind all the old surroundings, the nursings, and medicaments, and regulations, and the opening up of a new and unexplored existence, was

actually held out, and that by no mean hand, for her acceptance.

Imagine the shock to the whole planetary system of which Elizabeth was the sun, when one fine morning a rival poet, whose correspondence had hitherto been conducted on strictly literary, if warmly sympathetic, principles, drew near, and nothing awed by the splendour of her genius, nor yet daunted by the discovery of her years, coveted for himself the treasure of her love!

Mr. Robert Browning had realised his ideal, and heeded neither amazement nor expostulation.

He did not believe Miss Barrett was bound to be an invalid for life. He did not consider that there was any necessity for her to go on wasting more precious years lying helpless on her sofa. *He* would cure her. 'Love would find out the way.'

And, wonder of wonders, Elizabeth listened, believed, and was healed.

Great and bitter was the outcry which arose, when it first dawned upon father, brothers and sisters that their idol was to be taken from them. 'And yet,' naïvely remarks one of Mrs. Browning's biographers, 'the anger of Mr. Barrett towards his beloved daughter was neither unique nor singular.'

For years anxiety and affection, all that money and tender care would do, had been lavished on the petted darling of the house; it had been a part of the family creed that Elizabeth was not to be troubled—not to be distressed—not to be worried by this or that; while their loving ministrations and ready service being hers, ought not her fame, and the bright distinction she cast upon her father's roof to have been theirs?

Had she been a young girl—but she was no longer young, she was in her thirty-ninth year—she should not have been thus led astray.

Yet Elizabeth stood firm. Her imaginative mind had seized upon the new idea, and it was one which grew only brighter and more beautiful as it was dwelt upon and weighed in the balance.

Robert Browning pressed for a speedy marriage, and desired to bear off his bride to Italy for the winter, confident in the restorative powers of its sunny atmosphere, and the open-air life which could in consequence be had there.

'Winter,' we learn, 'with all its accumulative terrors was rapidly nearing; on one hand was "the sofa and silence" of home, shared with an

estranged father, and a probable relapse into illness—on the other was Hope, Italy and Love.' On the 12th of September the poet and the poetess were joined in holy matrimony, and a wedlock of the purest happiness and a complete union of heart, mind, and soul was begun.

We need not pause to chronicle the surprise, not to say the mute astonishment of the world at large—physicians probably excepted; physicians know many such cases, when a strong mental effort, and a sufficient inducement, is all that is required to rob the sick-room of its prey. But all others, all who had been privileged to come and go, and mark the harmonious routine of Elizabeth Barrett's sick chamber, and contemplate this routine ending only with life itself, must indeed have marvelled as at a miracle.

It is an old story now that whithersoever the distinguished bride and bridegroom turned their steps they were hailed with a sort of solemn amazement, as though 'some strange thing' had befallen the pair, and those who heard from afar the tidings, were scarce able to credit the tale.

Not the less true is it that after an interval of four years, chiefly passed amid the genial climes of France and Italy, Mrs. Browning returned to England another woman; body and mind alike

inspired by a fresh spring of youth and health. Not only was she the proud and happy wife of one of the most distinguished men of his day, not only was her fame as a poetess sweetened by its conjunction with his as a poet, but she was a mother, and a mother of the most devoted type.

Those who now beheld the bright, sparkling, enthusiastic creature, *spirituelle* indeed, but no longer suffering and helpless, could scarce believe they saw the same Elizabeth, for whom a single life had seemed a foregone conclusion at an earlier period.

Her baby grew and throve; she and her husband plied alike their congenial tasks; the world opened wide its arms on every side; and for some years an almost ideal happiness fell to the lot of our poetess beneath the blue Italian skies she learned to love so dearly.

Aurora Leigh was the result, together with many smaller poems of great beauty. *Aurora Leigh*, although written in a vein of the purest nobility, is by no means a poem to be placed in the hands of youthful readers. Like the finest work of many of the finest minds, it deals with human life in its vital depths, and these depths cannot of course be sounded by the young and inexperienced.

All who came within reach of Mrs. Browning's influence testify to the impression received. 'With her,' said Story, 'everything was religion . . . association with the Brownings, even though of the slightest nature, made one better in mind and soul.' 'It is marvellous to me,' averred Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'how so extraordinary, so acute, and so sensitive a creature, can impress us as she does with a sense of her benevolence.' Another adds: 'Her character was well nigh perfect'.

Towards the middle of the year 1860, Mrs. Browning caught a severe cold, but although her original delicacy of constitution had reasserted itself more than once since her marriage, interfering with plans for foreign travel, and occasionally rendering her friends anxious, no apprehensions were entertained on this particular occasion. Her gentle spirit had, however, received its summons, though even on the 28th of June—the last evening of her life—she was unaware of danger, and bade her 'own bright boy' 'good night' with fond assurances that she was 'better—much better'.

Did the keen eyes, which during the past fifteen years had grown so familiar with every lineament of that dear face, know better? All through the night the husband watched alone. The breath of the sleeper went and came more

and more softly. At daybreak, he bent closer to listen, he wrapped her in his arms, and knew not when she passed. Was this Death? Her own answer came back as if from the other world:—

> But angels say—and through the word
> The motion of this smile is heard,—
> 'He giveth His belovèd, sleep'.

'GEORGE ELIOT.'

XII.—'GEORGE ELIOT.'

NOT only the name but the work of 'George Eliot' is so familiar to us all, she seems to be so entirely a writer of modern times, a celebrity of to-day, that it is with difficulty some of us can realise the fact that Mary Ann Evans was born in the reign of George III., and during the lifetime of Byron and Goëthe.

The strange little girl who was afterwards to develop into one of the most powerful thinkers of the nineteenth century, opened her eyes on a curious period of translation in the history of England. The land was at rest after the last great Napoleonic war—but that rest partook of lethargy; and though some of the inventions and discoveries which have transformed the face of the globe were on the eve of blazing forth, there was in the year 1819—the date of 'George Eliot's' birth—and for some time thereafter, a lull, a leisure, and a tranquillity, which all had their influence in forming the mind of this very remarkable woman. Down in the rural districts

circle were sketched in at intervals; such as the aunts and uncles in the *Mill on the Floss;* while 'Maggie Tulliver' is universally understood to have had much of the author's own self in feeling and thought—but, like all true works of genius, the *actual* only furnished the basis for the *ideal.*

The outline was taken from life—the portrait was filled in from the writer's own powerful imagination.

Mary Ann Evans was the youngest member of her home, having one brother and sister of her own, whilst an elder pair, offspring of her father's previous marriage, made five young people in all at the old homestead. Thus the future authoress was the baby of the family, and doubtless also its household pet;—that she had a vast idea of her own importance at any rate, is clear; for in after years she was fond of laughing over her childish humours and conceits, one in particular, which prompted her at the age of four to open the piano and affect to be playing thereon with an air of diligence, though she did not know one note, when the maid-servant came into the room, in order to impress this functionary with a proper notion of her acquirements and position.

Nevertheless there was no precocity; nor indeed was the little girl on a par with many others of her age as regarded learning. Hers was the late awakening and the slow ripening of rich and

rare minds; even as she passed from one stage to another in life's journey she underwent fresh transitions of mental development; and whether, had she lived longer, she might not have left behind much that encumbered and perplexed, nay, that dimmed and smirched the glory of her final years, is a question that can never now be answered. In the presence of such genius it behoves those who have never been through the troubled waters of doubt and despair themselves, to bow their heads in silence. Rather let us thank God that their temptations are not such as fall to the lot of ordinary men and women; and neither judge, nor condemn.

For it was not long before intellectual and spiritual problems began to assail the soul of the young girl thus shut up in a remote country house with sisters imbued with ultra-evangelical and narrow-minded tendencies, and a brother whose sole ambition was to be first in the hunting field, and to be admitted to the social pleasures of the acquaintances he made there. Neither he nor any of them wanted to propound theories and argue confuting doctrines. They were alike satisfied; they could not see what more Mary Ann wanted than she had got. It is probably with reference to this blind, bitter time, this struggle with the forces at work within her bosom, that in *Daniel*

nda we have these lines: 'You can never ;ine what it is to have a man's force of genius ɔu, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a ' A man could have broken loose from the nanor house and rushed into the battlefield of A man could have torn aside the musty ıins wherewith the quiet country routine was ed, and let in the flood of light from beyond. t could a girl do?

ıen the sister, Christina, married, and the er being dead, housewifery cares devolved on r Ann, and for a time their homely claims ;ed what solitary wrestlings and reasonings failed to do. There was more cheerfulness, composure; and only occasional fits of ıir, 'of ever being able to achieve anything' : 'anything' obviously referring to intellectual ess.

:ture for yourselves, then, some years of this ırdly peaceful and monotonous existence (in ı, however, there was ever the battling down ıer instincts, the passionate hunger and thirst :her kinds of mental nourishment)—and then s a new phase of Mary Ann Evans' history. forms friendships; and these friendships ly influence her 'chameleon-like tempera- '. Unhappily the influence tends to unsettle eligious convictions, which had hitherto been

enthusiastically Calvinistic, and leads her through the mazes trod by Strauss, Comte, and others of their kind. In touch at last with people of superior understanding and education, it is little wonder that the inexperienced and still undeveloped genius of the young country girl should be led by them almost whithersoever they would. It is natural therefore to find her earliest steps in the world of letters taking the form of a translation of Strauss, and although she owns that she does 'not know *one* person likely to read the book through,' she confesses herself 'as happy as you may imagine' on the day—19th April, 1846—when the last chapter was completed.

Some years, however, had to be passed before the powers of 'George Eliot' found their true channel. It was not till after her union with the scholarly George Henry Lewes, to whose sympathy and support her intellectual life owed a vast and acknowledged debt, that the *Scenes of Clerical Life*, a series of remarkable sketches which followed each other in rapid succession in *Blackwood's Magazine*, made her conscious of her creative powers.

Scenes of Clerical Life met with an immediate burst of recognition and applause, the like of which has fallen to no other unknown writer of this century, if we except the *furore* occasioned by

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ley. Even *Jane Eyre* had longer to wait. rts of conjectures were made as to their ship, the prevailing opinion being strongly ur of their being the outcome of a masculine

ckeray pronounced with decision that *they not written by a woman.* Mrs. Carlyle is idea 'conceived in her mind,' that the rn was 'a man of middle age, with a wife, hom he got the beautiful feminine touches; good many children, and a dog. . . . For ;, not just a clergyman, but brother or first to a clergyman.' Froude, in thanking for y, could not tell 'whether he was address- young man, or an old—a clergyman, or a '. Dickens was almost alone in his acuter , when he would 'have been strongly d, if left to his own devices, to address the as a woman'; he had observed, he adds, womanly touches," that if they originated woman, no man ever before had the art ing himself mentally so like a woman, since ld began'. Encouraged by such plaudits, as by the great sale of the book, and urged r it up speedily, 'George Eliot' now began st splendid work of fiction, *Adam Bede.* arts of the MS. having been submitted to n Blackwood, the noted editor and pub-

lisher, he laconically and characteristically remarked with a smile: 'This will do,' after perusing a page, and put the roll in his pocket; but 'This will do,' from John Blackwood meant a world's encomiums. *Adam Bede* was published on 1st February, 1859. The first *ab extra* opinion which reached its author, and which she declared to be 'precisely what she desired,' came from a cabinet-maker, (brother of the Blackwoods' managing clerk,) who having read the sheets, declared that the writer 'must have been brought up to the business, or must at least have listened to the workmen in the workshops'. *Adam Bede*, however, was not so quick in catching flame with the public, as the *Scenes* had been; and it was not for some weeks that there came word from Edinburgh, that 'the Bedesman' (John Blackwood to the life!) 'had turned the corner, and was coming in a winner!' Thenceforth copies of 'the Bedesman' were poured forth by tens of thousands, its characters were discussed in every quarter of the globe, and its finest passages laid hold of by all the first critics of the day.

Many were of the opinion expressed by Charles Reade, that it was 'the finest thing since Shakespeare'; and so loud and universal was the song of praise that the author may well be excused for having 'a great deal of deep, silent joy,' when

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ling how the book 'tells on people's hearts'. of further adding, that the success had so triumphantly beyond anything she ever ıed of, that 'it would be tiresome to put down ulars'. Anon we have: 'Shall I ever write er book as true as *Adam Bede?* The t of the future presses upon me, and makes felt even more than the deep satisfaction of ıst and present.' This was the true ring of ;, self-distrustful, anxious, earnest; and it is ırprising that with such apprehensions, *The m the Floss* was worked out with even more ınd pains than its predecessor, and in no took from, but added greatly to 'George ;' fame.

: *Mill on the Floss* is indeed a tale of sur-g interest—vivid, picturesque, intensely ic—yet with the pathos so woven in and ' rural innocence and simplicity, that 'twixt ng and smiling, the reader is held spellbound first to last, till on the awful beauty of the scene the curtain drops. *Adam Bede* may judged 'George Eliot's' masterpiece, from andpoint of intellect, but *The Mill on loss* has almost a stronger hold upon our ons.

ere now followed in rapid succession those whose names are familiar to all, and which

it may now be added, were not written, and were never intended for readers not conversant with life in all its stages. None of 'George Eliot's' magnificent work is suitable for the very young.

Silas Marner, *Romola*, *Felix Holt*, were issued at intervals averaging two years; and these ending with her poems in blank verse *The Legend of Jubal* and the *Spanish Gypsy*, (the latter appearing in 1868,) thenceforth begins a new epoch in 'George Eliot's' literary career.

She rested, travelled, sought health—which was never hers for long together—in various countries, and interested herself in domestic and family affairs. Music was her principal recreation, and this taste was the one which drew her more out of herself than any other. Also her love of listening to classical and orchestral music being shared by Mr. Lewes, the pair were to be seen regularly every Monday evening attending the Popular Concerts in St. James's Hall, London, which was perhaps the only opportunity the general public ever had of gazing on its leading female novelist. Her picture by Richmond was shown the present writer, hanging in John Blackwood's private room in the old Edinburgh publishing house. It represents a long-drawn and somewhat rough-hewn countenance with heavy-lidded eyes, and thick, full lips. The expression is pained and

e; and one looks in vain for any trace
ayful humour, or tenderness. That this
llously endowed woman *had* softness, and
nes a keen sense of what was whimsical
roll in the world around and beneath, no
an doubt, but neither one nor the other
y is to be perceived on the surface.

1st January, 1869, we have this record in
ge Eliot's' diary: 'I have set myself many
for the year, I wonder how many will be
plished? A novel called *Middlemarch;* a
poem on Timoleon; and several minor
s.'

know that *Middlemarch*, at any rate, was
plished. Furthermore, that it came out in
ly shilling numbers, and we can ourselves
the rage for these, and the excitement of
tition, when the sale exceeded the demand.
yet I fancy there are not many among us
would now estimate *Middlemarch* as ranking
side of 'George Eliot's' earlier and grander
ptions. It is dull; it is heavily encumbered
learning; and it lacks the lesser beauties,
xquisite side-touches wherewith they are
nkled throughout. That its author received
ormous sum of money for its copyright, says
g; neither it, nor *Daniel Deronda*, which
ed in 1876, and was belarded with praise

from certain quarters, ever took the popular fancy as did their predecessors.

Daniel Deronda is of course a great book—but it is not a pleasant book. Neither is *Middlemarch*, while *Theophrastus Such* was, comparatively speaking, received with indifference, and is only rescued from oblivion by being the medium of some of 'George Eliot's' sayings and epigrams, now transferred to Birthday Books and Extract Books innumerable. *Theophrastus Such* was not penned till after Mr. Lewes' death, and its authorship alternated with the editing and preparing for the press some of his unfinished MSS. 'Here I and sorrow sit,' is the one touching entry in the mourner's journal on the opening day of 1879.

Had these been the final words inserted in its pages, it would have been the better for her name and fame; but on the 6th of March, 1880, little more than a year afterwards, 'George Eliot' was married to Mr. J. W. Cross, and this union, though it doubtless cheered the few remaining months of her life, was, it may be confessed, a blow to those who had stood by her through all the doubtful welfare of her private life, as well as through the sunshine of her literary career.

She did not long survive the attempted renewal of domestic happiness. A sore throat,

supervening on a long, previous illness, awakened the anxiety of those about her, and an eminent physician was summoned in haste, but no human aid could avail. Her magnificent mind became overcast; from one stage of unconsciousness the patient passed to another; and finally Death entered the chamber during the night of the 22nd December, 1880.

A great writer, a profound thinker, a marvellous linguist, and powerful influencer of the minds of others, 'George Eliot' has left, as yet, none behind her of whom it can be said that intellectually her mantle has fallen upon them.

With her, therefore, this series of *Famous English Authoresses* may justly close. Equal in gifts to any who went before, she had a wider sphere in which to shine, and a more cultivated audience to whom to appeal. What place posterity will ultimately assign to her work cannot yet be estimated; she is still too much of a living, breathing influence among us, and we scarce can realise that her outward presence has departed.

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